

Introducing the New Testament

2nd Edition

EXPLORE Readings

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1.0

Background Information for Understanding the New Testament

The world of the New Testament is so different from our own that we may find its concepts, customs, and terminology confusing. Bible dictionaries, commentaries, and encyclopedias offer explanations for such matters. Here is a sampling of what one might learn about certain aspects of the New Testament world:

anointing: the application of ointment or oil to a body or object.

Kings were anointed with oil at their coronation (cf. Luke 4:18); the sick sometimes were anointed with oil to accompany prayers for their healing (Mark 6:13; James 5:14); a host might anoint a favored guest with some sort of fragrant ointment (Luke 7:38, 46; John 11:2; 12:3–6); mourners anointed corpses with scented oils to remove the stench of death (Mark 16:1; John 12:7–8); the term “messiah” means “Anointed One” (John 1:41), and Christians seized on the ambiguity of whether this meant “anointed to rule” or “anointed to die” (Mark 14:8).

betrothal: a marriage that had not yet been consummated. A couple who had been betrothed were legally married—the relationship could be ended only by divorce—but they did not yet live in a sexual relationship as a married couple. Reasons for such an intermediate state included: (1) the wife was underage; (2) the

dowry had not yet been paid (thus the man had essentially reserved a woman to be his wife but was not allowed to take her to his home until he had paid for her); (3) the bride's and/or groom's family needed more time and money to prepare a proper wedding. See Matthew 1:18.

carpenter: construction worker or builder who worked with wood or stone. Jesus is identified as a carpenter (in Greek, *tektōn*) in Mark 6:3 and as the son of a carpenter in Matthew 13:55. It is possible that Jesus (and Joseph) had a carpenter shop in which they made wooden doors and furniture for the mud-brick houses in their village. However, many scholars think that the term “carpenter” was used for common laborers who worked on Roman construction projects. The village of Nazareth may have been a community for such persons, providing opportunity for them to work in the nearby city of Sepphoris.

centurion: a Roman army officer in charge of one hundred soldiers. See Matthew 8:5–13; 27:54; Mark 15:39, 44–45; Luke 7:2, 6; 23:47; Acts 10; 21:31–32; 22:25–26; 23:17, 23; 24:23; 27.

corban: literally, “given to God,” the practice of setting aside for religious purposes what typically was used in another way (cf. Lev. 1:2; Num. 7:13). Jesus criticizes the Pharisees for encouraging people to declare as “corban” money that they should use to care for their elderly parents. See Mark 7:11–13.

crucifixion: a Roman form of execution designed to terrorize subjugated populations. Men and women were nailed or tied naked to wooden stakes (sometimes with cross beams) and left to die of asphyxiation when the weight of their hanging body made breathing impossible (this took several hours). Sometimes the victim was seated on a small block to prevent asphyxiation, and death from exposure then took several days. The exact manner of crucifixion varied and may have been left to the discretion of soldiers, but the goal was to cause maximum torment and humiliation and to do so in public view as a warning to others. Crucifixion generally was reserved for lower classes or enemies of the state. Bodies normally were left on the crosses to be consumed by scavengers. See Matthew 27:33–60; Mark 15:22–46; Luke 23:33–53; John 19:16–42.

cubit: a common (though somewhat inconsistent) unit for measuring distance. A cubit (in Greek, *pēchys*) was equal to the span from a typical man's elbow to the tip of his middle finger (about 17.5 to 20 inches). See Revelation 21:17; see also the KJV of Matthew 6:27; Luke 12:25; John 21:8.

denarius: a silver coin that was the usual day's wage for a typical laborer. See Matthew 18:28; 20:2, 9–10, 13; 22:19; Mark 6:37; 12:15; 14:5; Luke 7:41; 10:35; 20:24; John 6:7; 12:5; Revelation 6:6.

first watch: roughly six to nine o'clock at night. Likewise, the second watch is nine o'clock to midnight, the third watch from midnight to three o'clock in the morning, and the fourth watch from three o'clock to dawn (i.e., 6 a.m.). The idea was to divide the time between sunset (around 6 p.m.) and sunrise (around 6 a.m.) into four equal segments. The NRSV often does not translate these literally; see the KJV or RSV of Mark 6:48; Luke 12:38.

hem/fringe of garment: the four tassels that devout Jewish men wore at the corners of their outer garment. These tassels had symbolic meaning, with different-colored threads standing for various thoughts, but they served generically to remind the wearer of an obligation to keep the Torah. Jesus criticizes the Pharisees for wearing ostentatious tassels on their garments (Matt. 23:5), but apparently he wore less showy ones himself (Matt. 9:20; Mark 6:56).

lamp: the most common means of providing light at night (people did not have wax candles). A simple receptacle, usually made of pottery, was filled with oil, and a lit wick could be dropped in to float. Lamps were portable, but they also could be placed on a tall stand to emit maximum light in a particular area. See Matthew 5:15; 6:22; 25:1–8; Mark 4:21; Luke 11:33–36; 12:35; 15:8; John 5:35; Acts 20:8; Hebrews 9:2; 2 Peter 1:19; Revelation 1:12–20; 2:1–5; 11:4; 18:23; 21:23; 22:5.

leprosy: not the illness that we know as Hansen’s disease, but rather any disfigurement on the surface of a person or thing, including mildew on clothing, mold on a house, or rust on metal. With humans, it could include a range of disfiguring conditions, from birthmarks to acne to more severe and debilitating skin diseases. See Matthew 8:2–3; 10:8; 11:4–5; 26:6; Mark 1:40–45; 14:3; Luke 4:27; 5:12–13; 7:22; 17:12–19.

magi: Persian sages or religious leaders who practiced a mixture of sorcery and astrology. The Jewish people in New Testament times identified the sorcerers in Pharaoh’s court as magi (Exod. 7–9) along with Balaam (Num. 22–24) and Nebuchadnezzar’s ineffective dream interpreters (Dan. 2). In the New Testament, magi are found in Matthew 2; Acts 8:9–24; 13:6–12.

money changer: a person who exchanged one type of coin for another, extracting a small fee for the service. The motivation for such exchanges was religious: coins minted by the Romans usually bore images that made them unacceptable for use by pious Jews. Money changers functioned in the temple court (not inside the temple itself) so that temple-goers who wanted to make offerings or purchase animals for sacrifices could obtain untainted coins. See Mark 11:15.

oath: either a vow or an utterance of profanity. The first sense seems to predominate in biblical references: when people “swear,” they usually are swearing an oath or vow to do something (Jesus

forbids this in Matt. 5:33–37; see also Matt. 23:16–22; 26:63; Mark 6:23, 26; Acts 18:18; 23:12–14, 21–23; Heb. 6:13–18; 7:20–21, 28; James 5:12; Rev. 10:6). In a few instances, swearing might refer to the use of profanity (see Mark 14:71 KJV), which for Jewish people sometimes involved vulgar use of God’s name and was, by some reports, quite common.

phylacteries: a pair of small boxes containing passages of Scripture written on parchment, worn by devout Jewish men, one bound to the forehead and the other strapped to the wrist, so that the Torah might always be at their right hand and before their eyes (see Exod. 13:9, 16; Deut. 6:8; 11:18). Jesus criticizes the Pharisees for displaying their piety by wearing phylacteries that he considered to be excessively large (Matt. 23:5).

pinnacle of the temple: the summit of the Jerusalem temple, as reconstructed by Herod the Great in the years just prior to Jesus’s birth. The pinnacle of the Jerusalem temple is believed to have been the highest architectural point in the world at the time. It was destroyed (along with the rest of the temple) by Titus, son of the Roman emperor Vespasian, in 70 CE. See Matthew 4:5; 24:1.

prison: the purpose of imprisonment was not reform or punishment, but rather to confine a person awaiting trial. After trial, a guilty prisoner was punished or executed, not sentenced to further confinement. Prison conditions varied greatly, from dark dungeons to house arrest. See Matthew 11:2; 14:3; 25:36–44; Luke 21:12;

Acts 4:3; 5:17–25; 8:3; 12:4–19; 16:23–24; 21:33–26:32; Romans 16:7; 2 Corinthians 11:23; Ephesians 3:1; 4:1; Philippians 1:7, 13; Colossians 4:3, 10; 2 Timothy 1:8; Philemon 1, 9; Hebrews 13:3; Revelation 2:10.

prostitutes: female slaves forced to perform sexual services for the financial benefit of their masters. In Roman cities there may have been professional “high class” prostitutes, but in the areas of Palestine that serve as settings for New Testament stories all prostitutes appear to have been slaves; thus we hear of no ex-prostitutes (specifically, Mary Magdalene is never said to be a prostitute). See Matthew 21:31–32; Luke 7:36–50. New Testament passages that speak of prostitutes as immoral persons (rather than as marginalized outcasts) refer to persons outside Palestine, in a “far country” (Luke 15:13, 30) or in notorious Corinth (1 Cor. 6:9, 15–16).

Roman citizenship: was obtained by being born a Roman citizen, and otherwise was granted only by the emperor or his designated representatives. Benefits of citizenship included: one was accountable only to imperial law rather than to local statutes (which varied throughout the empire); one could not be subjected to torture or corporal punishment without a trial; if accused of a crime, one could appeal to Caesar to have the case heard in Rome. See Acts 16:37; 22:25–29; 23:27.

Sabbath day's journey: the distance that one was allowed to travel on the Sabbath without violating religious observation of that day as a time for rest. The actual distance prescribed is no longer known, and it may have varied with time and place. See Acts 1:12; cf. Matthew 24:20.

Sanhedrin: a council of Jewish leaders that met in Jerusalem. In the New Testament, both Pharisees and Sadducees are said to sit on the Sanhedrin, which is also described as being composed of “chief priests, scribes, and elders.” See Mark 14:55; 15:1, 43; John 11:47; Acts 4:5–21; 5:21–42; 6:12–15; 22:5, 30; 23:1–10, 12–22.

shepherd: usually an itinerant or migrant worker hired to care for sheep and goats. In New Testament times, the profession of shepherd was a low-class position, near the bottom of the social scale. It was a dirty, demanding, and dangerous job that most people would not pursue if they were capable of finding better work. Shepherds appear to have been particularly despised by the religious establishment, perhaps because they violated Sabbath and purity regulations. See Matthew 18:12–14; 25:32; Mark 6:34; 14:27; Luke 2:8–20; John 10:1–16; Acts 20:28; Hebrews 13:20; 1 Peter 2:25; 5:4; Revelation 7:17.

slavery: could result from a sentence of punishment for various offenses; slavery was not always permanent. Entire families were sold into slavery when someone defaulted on a debt. Between

one-fourth and one-third of the people in the Roman Empire were slaves. Conditions varied enormously from agreeable to appalling. Nevertheless, a slave was a person with no honor, a person who literally lived in disgrace.

sowing seed: the agricultural practice of planting. In ancient Palestine the process seems to have been the reverse of what we are familiar with: first, the seed was thrown on the ground; then the ground was plowed, allowing the plow to work the previously scattered seed into the soil. See Mark 4:3–20; cf. Matthew 6:26; 13:24–43; 25:24, 26; Mark 4:31–32; John 4:36–37; 1 Corinthians 9:11; 15:36–37, 42–44; 2 Corinthians 9:6, 10; Galatians 6:7–8; James 3:18.

stadion: a somewhat inconsistent unit of measurement equal to six hundred feet (a foot being, literally, the length of a man’s foot). The NRSV avoids using the term, instead translating measurements given in stadia into equivalent feet or miles; the KJV uses “furlongs”; other versions use “stadia” in some cases. See Luke 24:13; John 6:19; 11:18; Revelation 14:20; 21:16.

swaddling clothes: linen wrapped tightly around a small child’s body to restrict its movements. In certain cultures it is common to swaddle a baby by rolling it in cloth with its arms at its sides. See Luke 2:7.

talent: a unit of silver, measured by weight, approximately seventy-five pounds of silver by our reckoning. One talent was equal to six thousand denarii. See Matthew 18:23–35; 25:14–30.

tax collector: native citizen of a conquered territory hired by the Romans to collect taxes for the empire. Tax collectors were viewed as traitors and usually were suspected of skimming money by collecting more than was actually due and keeping the surplus for themselves. Some of the tax collectors in the New Testament (e.g., Matthew) appear to have been specifically assigned to collect tolls for the use of Roman roads. See Matthew 5:46; 9:9–12; 10:3; 11:19; 18:17; 21:31–32; Luke 3:12–14; 7:29; 15:1; 18:10–14; 19:1–10.

temple tax: an annual payment to support the temple in Jerusalem. It was completely voluntary, but devout Jews throughout the Roman Empire were expected to pay it as an act of piety. Roman law allowed Jews who opted to pay this tax to deduct the amount from whatever civic taxes they owed to the empire. See Matthew 17:24–27.

third hour: roughly nine o'clock in the morning. Likewise, the sixth hour is noon, the ninth hour is three o'clock in the afternoon, and the eleventh hour is about five o'clock. The basic thought seems to be that the workday begins at sunrise (around 6 a.m.) and ends at sunset (around 6 p.m.), but the hours are numbered according to when they conclude rather than when they start (the third hour

ends at 9 a.m.; the sixth hour ends at noon). The NRSV frequently does not translate these references literally but instead substitutes the appropriate modern reference. See the KJV, NIV, or RSV of Matthew 20:3, 5–6, 9; Mark 15:25, 33; John 1:39; 4:6, 52; 19:14; Acts 2:15; 3:1; 10:3, 9; cf. John 11:9.

winnowing grain: the practice of tossing grain into the air with a large fork or fan so that the wind will blow away dust and other lightweight impurities, the chaff. See Matthew 3:12.

1.1

Cities and Towns Mentioned in the New Testament

In Judea

Azotus: near the Mediterranean; the ancient Ashod, visited by Philip (Acts 8:40).

Bethany: near Jerusalem, on a slope of the Mount of Olives; the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus (John 12:1).

Bethlehem: six miles south of Jerusalem; the birthplace of Jesus (Matt. 2:1).

Emmaus: seven miles south of Jerusalem; the place to which the two disciples were walking when joined by Jesus (Luke 24:13).

Gaza: near the Mediterranean, to which a road led from Jerusalem (Acts 8:26).

Jericho: in the valley of the Jordan, where Jesus restored sight to Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46).

Jerusalem: the Holy City where all the great feasts were held (Luke 2:41).

Joppa: on the Mediterranean; the port of Jerusalem, where Peter saw a vision (Acts 11:5).

In Samaria

Antipatris: east of Shechem; the place to which the guard conveyed Paul by night (Acts 23:31).

Caesarea: on the Mediterranean, where Paul made his defense before Festus and Agrippa (Acts 25–26).

Sychar: in the valley between Ebal and Gerizim; the site of Jacob's well (John 4:5–6).

In Galilee

Bethsaida: a village on the Sea of Galilee; the native place of Peter, Andrew, and Philip (John 1:44).

Cana: a village four or five miles northeast of Nazareth, where Jesus performed his first miracle (John 2:11).

Capernaum: a city on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee, where Jesus lived and performed many miracles (Matt. 4:13).

Chorazin: a city on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee, against which Jesus pronounced woes (Matt. 11:21).

Magdala: a village on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, visited by Jesus (Matt. 15:39).

Nain: a village on a hill southeast of Nazareth, where Jesus raised to life the widow's son (Luke 7:11–12).

Nazareth: a town among the hills, about midway between the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean; celebrated as the place where Jesus was brought up (Luke 4:16).

Ptolemais: on the Mediterranean, north of Mount Carmel, where Paul landed on his way to Jerusalem (Acts 21:7).

Tiberias: a city on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, visited by Jesus (John 6:1).

In Perea

Bethabara: a place east of the Jordan, nearly opposite Jericho, where John baptized (John 1:28).

Machaeus: east of the Dead Sea; the place where John the Baptist was imprisoned and beheaded; not named in the Bible.

Decapolis

Bethsaida: on the northeastern shore of the Sea of Galilee; the place where Jesus fed the five thousand (Luke 9:10–17).

Gadara: a city south of the Sea of Galilee that gave its name to the district, “the country of the Gadarenes” (Mark 5:1).

Gergesa: a little village east of the Sea of Galilee; the place near which the demoniacs were cured and the swine drowned (Matt. 8:28–34).

In Phoenicia

Sidon: a city on the Mediterranean, about twenty miles north of Tyre, in a region once visited by Jesus (Mark 7:24).

Tyre: the celebrated commercial city of antiquity, on the Mediterranean; on “the coasts” of which Jesus cured the daughter of the Syro-Phoenician woman (Matt. 15:21–28).

In Syria

Antioch: on the river Orontes, seventeen miles from the Mediterranean, between the Tarsus and Lebanon ranges of mountains; the seat of the first missionary church (Acts 11:19–30).

Damascus: on a fertile plain, watered by the Abana and Pharpar, east of the Anti-Libanus mountains; the place of the apostle Paul’s conversion (Acts 9:1–25).

In Asia Minor

Antioch: a city in Pisidia, east of Ephesus, visited by Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:14).

Derbe: a town in Lycaonia, visited by Paul and Barnabas (Acts 16:1).

Ephesus: a celebrated city one mile from the Aegean Sea, where Paul preached for a long time, (Acts 19); one of the seven churches of Asia (Rev. 2:1).

Iconium: sixty miles east of Antioch, where Paul and Barnabas preached (Acts 14:1–5).

Laodicea: the capital of Phrygia, and the seat of one of the churches to which a message was sent by John (Rev. 3:14).

Lystra: not far from Derbe, also visited by Paul and Barnabas and where the two missionaries were thought to be gods (Acts 14:8–12); the home of Timothy (Acts 16:1).

Miletus: the port of Ephesus, where Paul delivered a farewell address (Acts 20:17–38).

Myra: an important town of Lycia, where Paul changed ships on his journey to Rome (Acts 27:5).

Patara: a seaport of Lycia, where Paul took ship for Phoenicia (Acts 21:1).

Perga: a city of Pamphylia, visited by Paul and Barnabas, and where Mark left them (Acts 13:13).

Pergamum: a city of Mysia; the site of one of the seven churches of Asia (Rev. 2:12).

Philadelphia: a town on the borders of Lydia; the seat of one of the seven churches of Asia (Rev. 3:7).

Sardis: an important city of Lydia; the seat of one of the seven churches of Asia (Rev. 3:1).

Smyrna: on the Aegean Sea, forty miles north of Ephesus; the seat of one of the seven churches in Asia (Rev. 2:8).

Tarsus: a city of Cilicia; the birthplace of the apostle Paul (Acts 9:11).

Thyatira: a city of Lydia; the seat of one of the seven churches of Asia (Rev. 2:18).

Troas: the ancient Troy, on the Aegean Sea, where Paul in a vision received the call to Macedonia (Acts 16:8–10).

In Macedonia

Amphipolis: thirty-three miles from Philippi and three miles from the Aegean Sea; visited by Paul (Acts 17:1).

Apollonia: a city thirty miles from Amphipolis, where Paul remained one day (Acts 17:1).

Berea: a small city on the eastern side of Mount Olympus, where Paul preached and where the people examined the Scriptures to see if his preaching was true (Acts 17:10–13).

Philippi: a flourishing city nine miles from the Aegean Sea, celebrated as the first foothold of the gospel in Europe (Acts 16:12–40).

Thessalonica: at the head of the Thermaic Gulf; an important commercial center, and the scene of Paul's labor (Acts 17:1–9).

Greece

Athens: one of the most celebrated cities of the world, situated five miles northeast of the Saronic Gulf, a part of the Aegean Sea; the seat of Grecian learning, and the place where Paul delivered one of his most famous discourses (Acts 17:15–34).

Corinth: an important city forty miles west of Athens, where Paul preached, and the seat of one of the leading churches (Acts 18:1–18).

In the Isles of the Sea

Fair Havens: a harbor in the island of Crete; a place where the ship on which Paul was sailing anchored (Acts 27:8).

Mitylene: on the island of Lesbos, in the Aegean Sea, where Paul's ship anchored for a night (Acts 20:14).

Paphos: on the western shore of Cyprus; visited by Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:6).

Salamis: on the eastern shore of Cyprus; visited by Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:5).

Syracuse: a celebrated city on the eastern shore of Sicily, where Paul stopped on his journey to Rome (Acts 28:12).

Italy

Appii Forum: a village on the Appian Way, forty-three miles from Rome, where Christians met Paul (Acts 28:15).

Puteoli: the leading port of Italy, where Paul disembarked (Acts 28:13).

Rhegium: a city on the southern extremity of Italy, where the ship in which Paul was journeying touched (Acts 28:13).

Rome: the great city of Italy, the capital of the Roman Empire, where Paul was taken for trial before Caesar (Acts 28:16), and where he was afterward put to death.

Three Taverns: a place eleven miles from Rome, where another band of Christians met Paul (Acts 28:15).

1.2

Coins Mentioned in the New Testament

Coins: Values and New Testament References		
The denarius or drachma is the standard unit, equal to a typical day's wage.		
talent	6,000 drachmae/denarii	Matt. 18:24; 25:14–30
mina	100 drachmae/denarii	Luke 19:13–26
shekel	4 drachmae/denarii	
stater	4 drachmae/denarii	Matt. 17:27
half-shekel	2 drachmae/denarii	
didrachmon	2 drachmae/denarii	Matt. 17:24
drachma	Greek: a day's wage	Luke 15:8
denarius	Roman: a day's wage	Matt. 18:28; 20:1–16; 22:19; Mark 6:37; 12:15; 14:5; Luke 7:41; 10:35; 20:24; John 6:7; 12:5; Rev. 6:6
assarion	1/10 drachma/denarius	Matt. 10:29
quadrans	1/4 assarion (1/40 drachma/denarius)	Matt. 5:26; Mark 12:42
lepton	1/2 quadrans (1/80 drachma/denarius)	Mark 12:42; Luke 12:59; 21:2

talent: This unit of silver was equal to six thousand Greek drachmae or Roman denarii. One talent was roughly equal to what a typical worker could earn over a sixteen-year period. Jesus tells a parable (Matt. 25:14–30) in which a wealthy man gives his servants different amounts of talents (one, two, five; in the latter case, the amount was more than the servant could hope to earn in a lifetime). In another parable (Matt. 18:23–35), Jesus uses creative exaggeration to stress

the incalculable difference between divine and human mercy: a servant owes his king (God) ten thousand talents (= millions of dollars) but is upset with a fellow servant who owes him one hundred denarii.

mina (pound): The NRSV uses the word “pound” for a Greek mina, a silver coin worth one hundred drachmae (or denarii). The only New Testament reference comes in a parable told by Jesus in Luke 19:13–26 (the parable of the pounds); another version of the same story appears in Matthew 25:14–30 (the parable of the talents).

denarius: This silver coin was the usual day’s wage for a typical laborer (see Matt. 18:28; 20:1–16; 22:19; Mark 6:37; 12:15; 14:5; Luke 7:41; 10:35; 20:24; John 6:7; 12:5; Rev. 6:6). The denarius (a Roman coin) appears to have been roughly equivalent in value to the drachma (a Greek coin). The “lost coin” in the parable that Jesus tells in Luke 15:8–10 is a drachma.

shekel (pieces of silver): The story of Judas receiving money to betray Jesus uses an imprecise term: the Greek simply says that Judas was paid thirty “silvers” (Matt. 26:15). Most scholars think this referred to thirty shekels. A shekel was a silver Judean coin (i.e., not Roman or Greek, for the priests avoided using coins bearing idolatrous images of Caesar or pagan gods). It was worth about four drachmae (or four denarii).

stater, didrachma (temple tax): The story of the temple tax in Matthew 17:24–27 involves two different Roman coins. The amount

of the annual temple tax was two drachmae (or two denarii) per person.

In Matthew 17:24, the NRSV uses the English expression “temple tax” to translate a reference to a Greek coin called the “didrachma,” a coin that was worth two drachmae. This was the typical coin that an individual used to pay the tax.

In Matthew 17:27, Jesus tells Peter to use the “coin” that he finds in a fish’s mouth to pay the temple tax for both of them. Here, the Greek word translated “coin” in the NRSV is *stater*. A stater was a silver Greek coin worth about four drachmae; thus the single coin could pay the temple tax for two people.

assarion, quadrans, lepta (penny): The NRSV uses the English word *penny* for three different Roman coins:

- An assarion was worth one-tenth of a denarius; this is the amount for which Jesus says two sparrows are sold (Matt. 10:29).
- A quadrans (in Greek, *kodrantēs*) was worth one-fourth of an assarion; this is the amount of the offering that the widow put in the temple treasury in Mark 12:42 (except that she used two coins [see below]; see also Matt. 5:26).
- A leptos was worth one-eighth of an assarion or one-half of a quadrans, the least value of any coin in circulation; the widow

in the temple put “two lepta, which make a quadrans” into the treasury (Mark 12:42).

1.3

Roman Emperors of the New Testament Period

Dates	Emperor	Contact with New Testament Concerns
27 BCE–14 CE	Augustus (Octavian)	usually regarded as the first Roman emperor; credited with establishing the <i>Pax Romana</i> ; birth of Jesus during his reign (Luke 2:1)
14–37 CE	Tiberius	ministry and death of Jesus occurred during his reign (Luke 3:1); appointed and later removed Pilate as governor of Judea; his image would have been on the coin shown to Jesus (Mark 12:14–17); see also Luke 23:2; John 19:12, 15; Acts 17:7
37–41 CE	Caligula (Gaius)	established reputation of emperors for cruelty and decadence; demanded that a statue of himself be placed in Jewish temple but died before this could be carried out
41–54 CE	Claudius	installed as a figurehead but turned out to be surprisingly competent; expelled Jews from Rome due to a disturbance over “Chrestus,” which brought Priscilla and Aquila into contact with Paul (Acts 18:1–4); made Herod Agrippa I king over Palestine (Acts 12:1–3)
54–68 CE	Nero	an exemplary ruler during his first five years, then turned self-indulgent and violent; responsible for horrific persecution of Christians; Peter was crucified and Paul beheaded during his reign (ca. 62–64)
69 CE	Galba Otho Vitellius	a time of civil war known as the “Year of Four Emperors”; Galba, Otho, and Vitellius rose to power in quick and forgettable successions before stability was restored under Vespasian
69–79 CE	Vespasian	the Roman general in the war with the Jews; returned to Rome to seize power when Nero died
79–81 CE	Titus	son of Vespasian; took over command of troops when his father became emperor; crushed the Jewish rebellion, destroyed the temple in Jerusalem, and presided over prolonged siege of Masada
81–96 CE	Domitian	reported to have persecuted Christians, but solid evidence for this is lacking; his reign perhaps forms the background for the anti-Roman sentiments in the book of Revelation

1.4

Roman Rulers in Palestine: New Testament

References

37–4 BCE ruled all Palestine	Herod the Great Matt. 2:1–19; Luke 1:5
4 BCE–6 CE ruled Judea, Samaria	Archelaus (a son of Herod the Great) Matt. 2:22
4 BCE–39 CE ruled Galilee	Herod Antipas (a son of Herod the Great) Matt. 14:1–12; Mark 6:14–29; Luke 3:19–20; 9:7–9; 13:31–33; 23:6–12
26–36 CE ruled Judea	Pontius Pilate Matt. 27:1–26; Mark 15:1–5; Luke 3:1; 13:1– 5; 23; John 18:28–19:22, 31–38; Acts 3:13; 4:27; 13:28; 1 Tim. 6:13
41–44 CE ruled all Palestine (Galilee from 37 to 40 CE)	Herod Agrippa I (a grandson of Herod the Great) Acts 12:1–23
52–60 CE ruled Judea	Felix Acts 23:23–24:27
60–62 CE ruled Judea	Festus Acts 24:27; 25–26
44–100 CE ruled Galilee	Herod Agrippa II (a son of Herod Agrippa I) Acts 25–26

1.5

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1.6

Centurions in the New Testament

A centurion (pronounced sen-tyoor´ee-uhn) was the commander of a hundred soldiers in a Roman legion. Six “centuries” (each led by a centurion) made up a cohort, which was led by a tribune. Ten cohorts comprised a Roman legion, which consisted of six thousand men. Centurions were prestigious members of a relatively small class of military leaders. They received substantial pensions on retirement and would be counted among the local notables of any town.

Six centurions are mentioned in New Testament narratives.

The unnamed centurion in Capernaum: A story in Matthew 8:5–13 and Luke 7:1–10 tells of Jesus healing the son or servant of a centurion in Capernaum. This seems to be the same incident recounted in John 4:46–53, although in that case the man is not identified as a centurion.

In Matthew’s version, the centurion comes to Jesus, begging him to heal his servant (or, possible, son), who is paralyzed and in terrible distress. The centurion insists that Jesus need not come to his house because, as one acquainted with authority, he knows that if Jesus merely speaks the word, the matter will be done. Jesus replies that he has not seen such faith anywhere in Israel, and he does speak the word that heals the servant in that very hour.

Luke's version of the story is slightly different. Instead of coming to Jesus himself, he sends Jewish leaders to make the request on his behalf. These leaders tell Jesus that the centurion is worthy of such benefit because "he loves our people, and it is he who built our synagogue for us" (7:5).

The unnamed centurion at the crucifixion: The Synoptic Gospels all report that a centurion was present at the crucifixion of Jesus (Matt. 27:54; Mark 15:39; Luke 23:47). The usual assumption is that this person would have been in charge of the soldiers responsible for the execution, including those who offered him bitter wine to drink, cast lots for his clothing, and mocked him on the cross. Still, both Matthew and Mark report that when Jesus dies, the centurion declares, "Truly this man was God's Son." In Luke, when Jesus dies, the centurion praises God and says, "Certainly this man was innocent."

Cornelius, a centurion in Caesarea: The book of Acts reports the story of the conversion of Cornelius, whose baptism sparked a controversy in the church concerning admission of gentiles (Acts 10:1–11:18; cf. 15:7–9).

Cornelius is said to belong to the Italian Cohort and to be "a devout man who feared God with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God" (Acts 10:2). Cornelius is directed by God in a vision to send for Simon Peter, who was in Joppa (modern Tel Aviv). The next day, God also gives Peter

a vision just before the men from Caesarea arrive, letting him know that “God shows no partiality” (10:34)

Later, as Peter is telling Cornelius about the resurrection of Jesus, the Holy Spirit falls on all who are present in a manner reminiscent of Pentecost (Acts 2:1–12). The realization that God pours out the Holy Spirit “even on the Gentiles” (10:45) leads to a phase in the church’s mission, and ultimately to a redefinition of its basic identity.

Unnamed centurions in Jerusalem: The book of Acts reports that centurions were instrumental in controlling a riot in Jerusalem that had been instigated by Jews upset with Paul (Acts 21:27–32). The exact number of centurions is not specified, but if a full cohort were employed, as seems to be case, then the number of centurions would have been six.

The centurions and other soldiers prevent the mob from beating Paul, but after his testimony further antagonizes them, the tribune orders him to be flogged. Paul then speaks to one of the centurions, asking if this is legal, since he is a Roman citizen. As a result, he is not flogged but brought to address the Jewish Council (22:24–30).

In the days that follow, a plot to assassinate Paul is revealed and one of the centurions delivers Paul’s message regarding this to the tribune (23:17). The latter orders two centurions to take Paul to Caesarea where he could be kept more safely, pending a hearing from the Roman governor (23:23–24).

Unnamed centurion in Caesarea: Acts 24:23 reports that a centurion in Caesarea was charged with keeping Paul in custody when the Roman governor Felix wished to delay sentencing him. This centurion was explicitly ordered to let Paul have some liberty and to allow Paul's friends to take care of his needs.

Julius, a centurion in Caesarea: The book of Acts reports that a centurion name Julius is charged with transferring Paul from Caesarea to Rome (27:1). Julius apparently serves in the same city where Cornelius was found some years earlier, but he is said to belong to the Augustan Cohort, not the Italian Cohort.

Julius is mentioned several times in the narrative of Paul's sea voyage (27:6, 11, 31, 43). At first, he does not listen to Paul when the latter warns of hazards; eventually he allows Paul to tell him what the soldiers should or should not be allowed to do and he even takes measures to insure Paul's safety when others wish to kill him.

1.7

Major Philosophical Schools

Epicureanism

- Traces its origins to Epicurus (341–270 BCE).
- Allows for free will, questioning the role of fate (or of the gods) to determine human lives.
- Pleasure is the ultimate goal of life, but true pleasure is found through the attainment of tranquility (freedom from anxiety), not through simple gratification of desires.
- Those seeking true pleasure exercise their free will to enjoy good things in moderation and to make responsible choices that improve their lives and the lives of others.
- Likewise, followers avoid those things that lead to disappointment, pain, or grief (romantic love, emotional attachment, political commitments, devotion to material things).
- Rejects any sense of afterlife: what meaning life has is to be found here and now.
- Sometimes degenerated into a notion of freedom from accountability or responsibility (rather than from anxiety); Epicureans were then regarded as “pleasure seekers” in a crass sense, and the philosophy was viewed as a license for self-indulgence.

Stoicism

- Traces its origins to Zeno (333–264 BCE), reshaped by Epictetus in the first century CE.
- Everything is predetermined; history is cyclical and repetitious.
- Virtue is what matters most in life, and it is attainable through acceptance of fate.
- Those seeking virtue appreciate the logic of the universe (called Logos or Reason) and are indifferent to circumstances (“no reason for joy, still less for grief”).
- Epictetus accentuated the moral obligation of virtue: love and respect for all people, whose merits and station in life lie beyond their control.

Cynicism

- Traces its origins to Diogenes of Sinope (ca. 410–324 BCE).
- More lifestyle than dogma; emphasizes radical authenticity and independence.
- Authenticity is attained through repudiation of shame: no embarrassment over bodily features or functions; no concern for reputation or status.
- Independence is attained through renunciation of what cannot be obtained freely, by embracing simplicity and voluntary poverty and desiring to have only what is natural and necessary.

- Cynics employed diatribe for pedagogical instruction, a style of teaching or argument that uses rhetorical questions to engage in conversation with an imaginary partner.

Pythagoreanism

- Traces its origins to Pythagora of Samos (ca. 570–495 BCE), a mathematician.
- Intelligence is to be valued above all else; memory is thus highly prized.
- The pursuit of intelligence involves a reasoning process that seeks single hypotheses to explain all relevant facts.
- But truth also has a mystical side, as is illustrated in the power of music, which is highly mathematical, and yet can heal disease and affect appetites.
- In accord with the appreciation of music, success in life is measured through the attainment of harmony (of ideas, of body and soul, etc.).
- The goal of harmony may be achieved through intelligence, when employed with radical honesty.

Middle Platonism

- Traces its origins to Plato (ca. 425–423 BCE), the influential Athenian philosopher, with development of ideas that would

eventually crystallize into Neoplatonism under the influence of Plotinus (204–270 CE).

- Articulated especially by Plutarch (45–125 CE) and highly influential on both the Jewish writer Philo of Alexandria (30 BCE–45 CE) and the Christian theologian Origen (185–245 CE).
- Posits the existence of a creative first principle, the intermediaries of which account for various world religions.
- The material world is but a type or shadow of an intellectual reality that might be represented as the Logos (rational principle or “thoughts of god”).
- Insists on freedom of the will—divine providence involves cooperation between human will and divine agency.
- Emphasizes the immortality of the human soul, leaving open possibilities of transmigration or reincarnation, but denying death in the absolute sense that implies cessation of one’s essential, rational being.
- The goal of life often involves preserving a purity of the soul that recognizes the value of truth, reason, and ideas, avoiding the corruption of what is false, temporal or material.

1.8

Artemis of the Ephesians

Artemis (pronounced ahr´tuh-mis) was a goddess widely worshiped in antiquity throughout the Hellenistic and Roman world. Although identified with the Greek Artemis (and the Roman Diana), the sister of Apollo, the Ephesian Artemis had little in common with those deities of classical mythology. She was more like the ancient Anatolian and Asian mother goddess known also as Cybele. Above all, she was a patroness of nature and fertility.

The worship of some sort of mother goddess in this region antedated the settlement of Greeks in the area (ca. 1000 BCE). Acts 19:35 refers to a “sacred stone that fell from the sky” (ESV), possibly a meteorite, which might have been connected with this ancient cult.

By New Testament times, the goddess of the Ephesians had assumed a distinctive image: the upper region of her body was covered with numerous breasts (or possibly eggs), and she wore a turret crown and a long skirt with bands of animals and birds in relief. She was often accompanied by dogs or stags on either side, probably due to the syncretism with the original Greek Artemis.

The earliest Greek shrine to Artemis consisted of two simple platforms, but around 600 BCE the Cretan architect Chersiphron constructed a massive and impressive temple, known throughout the world as the Artemision. It took approximately one hundred years to

complete; by 500 BCE it measured 375 by 180 feet and had 60-foot marble columns. Then in 356 BCE this glorious temple burned to the ground, somewhat ominously some would say, on the very night that Alexander the Great was born.

The architect Dinocrates soon began a new Artemision, which was completed around 250 BCE. Even more glorious than its predecessor, it was regarded at the time of Jesus as one of the “seven wonders of the world” (as was the Jewish temple in Jerusalem). Certainly the Artemision is what put Ephesus on the map for many Romans, and by the time Paul visited the city, it had stood for three hundred years as the symbol of Ephesian prosperity and national pride.

Paul’s letter to the Ephesians makes no mention of Artemis or of her temple, but the book of Acts tells of Paul preaching so effectively that many Ephesians feared interest in Artemis could wane. In particular, members of the guild of silversmiths (led by a certain Demetrius) were afraid that their trade of making silver shrines of Artemis would be jeopardized (19:23–27). Opinion varies concerning just what these shrines may have been, as nothing quite like this has been found.

The Goths destroyed the Artemision in 263 CE. Practically nothing of it remains today.

1.9

Slavery in the Roman World (Box 23.2)

The institution of slavery was deeply ingrained in Roman society. Roman conquests often led to the enslavement of resident populations, and slave hunters captured victims in provinces not yet overtaken by Rome (cf. 1 Tim. 1:10; Rev. 18:13). Individuals could be sentenced to slavery as punishment for various offenses, and entire families were sold into slavery when someone defaulted on a debt. Since children born to slaves were automatically slaves themselves, the passage of generations guaranteed growth of a large slave population. By the time of Paul, between one-fourth and one-third of all people in the empire were slaves.

The life and condition of slaves seems to have varied enormously. Social decorum encouraged humane treatment, and the extreme abuse or killing of slaves was prohibited by law. Still, the welfare of slaves generally depended on the disposition of their masters. In some cases—notably, for slaves who worked in mines or rowed the oars of galley ships—the conditions of life were appalling. In other instances, however, slaves were given an education and provided with a lifestyle that they probably would not have been able to attain on their own. Indeed, many persons willingly sold themselves into slavery in exchange for being taught a trade or obtaining employment that would improve their lot in life.

Slavery was not always permanent. In some cases, slaves were paid a wage and allowed to purchase their freedom after a period of time; in other cases, slaves were automatically freed when they reached the age of thirty. Nevertheless, slaves had few legal rights. They could be beaten at the discretion of their master, they could not legally marry, and any children they produced were the property of their master (cf. Matt. 18:25, 34; 24:48–51; 25:30). They had virtually no autonomy—no ability to make decisions regarding their own lives or destinies—and in a world that valued honor above all else, they occupied the bottom tier of the social pyramid. A slave was a person with no honor—a person who literally lived in disgrace.

1.10

Two Roman Writers: Suetonius and Tacitus

SUETONIUS (ca. 69–135 CE). Suetonius served as secretary to the emperor Hadrian and became one of the most important historians of the Roman Empire. His book *Lives of the Caesars* covers the emperors from Julius Caesar through Domitian. Although he has a penchant for telling salacious stories, he also had access to the imperial archives and is able to quote directly from numerous letters and other documents related to Roman rule. In one place he writes that the emperor Claudius “banished from Rome all the Jews, who were continually making disturbances at the instigation of one Chrestus” (*Life of Claudius* 25). Most scholars think that this “Chrestus” is a mangled spelling of the Latin for “Christ.” The event to which Suetonius refers, then, is the same as that reported in the book of Acts, where we hear that Christian Jews were expelled from Rome by Claudius (Acts 18:2).

TACITUS (ca. 56–117 CE). Tacitus was a Roman historian whose two works, *Annals* and *Histories*, cover the period from the death of Caesar Augustus to the end of Domitian’s reign. His work is considered to be fairly accurate, though it is obvious that he wanted to portray the emperors in the worst possible light. Unfortunately, only portions of the two books have survived; the *Histories* breaks off just as the author is beginning to tell about the fall of Jerusalem.

Tacitus does, however, mention the crucifixion of Jesus in one passage, and he also describes the persecution of Christians:

Nero had self-acknowledged Christians arrested. Then, on their information, large numbers of others were condemned. . . . Their deaths were made farcical. Dressed in wild animals' skins, they were torn to pieces by wild dogs, or crucified, or made into torches to be ignited after dark as substitutes for daylight. . . . Despite their guilt as Christians and the ruthless punishment it deserved, the victims were pitied, for it was felt that they were being sacrificed to one man's brutality rather than to the national interest. (*Annals* 15.44)

1.11

Two Jewish Writers: Philo and Josephus

PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA (20 BCE–50 CE). Philo was a contemporary of Jesus, though he shows no knowledge of having heard of Jesus. He lived in Alexandria (in northern Egypt) and provides us with a fairly extreme example of Hellenistic Judaism. His writings try to reconcile the Hebrew Scriptures with Greek philosophy (especially Platonism and Stoicism). He wants to show Jews that many Hellenistic ideas are actually taught (often allegorically) in their Scriptures, and he wants to show others that the Jewish religion is an intellectually respectable and profound faith. His writings sometimes reveal things about the Jewish and Roman worlds that might otherwise be unknown to us (e.g., a section of one book describes the beliefs and practices of the Essenes).

JOSEPHUS (37–100 CE). Josephus was a Jewish aristocrat born into a priestly family just one generation after Jesus. He became an important historian, concentrating most of his writings on matters pertaining to the Jewish people. During the war with Rome, he led the Jewish forces in Galilee, but after he was captured he went over to the Roman side and later became a court historian in Rome. His book *Jewish Antiquities* retells much of Jewish history for a Roman audience. *The Jewish War* picks up that story around the beginning of the second century BCE and continues through the siege in

Masada that ended the recent conflict. The writings of Josephus contain numerous stories about the New Testament era as viewed from a Hellenistic Jewish perspective, including details about Pontius Pilate and the various Herodian rulers, and even a few references to John the Baptist and Jesus.

1.12

Pontius Pilate in History and Ancient Literature

Pontius Pilate (pronounced pon'shuhs p/luht) was the Roman prefect of Judea from 26 to 36 CE. Thus he was the fifth governor of the province and the second-longest holder of the office. His term included the time of John the Baptist's activity, as well as that of the public ministry and crucifixion of Jesus (see Luke 3:1).

Pilate is mentioned several times in the New Testament in connection with events surrounding the trial and crucifixion of Jesus (Matt. 27:1–2, 11–26; Mark 15:1–15; Luke 23:1–25; John 18:28–19:16; Acts 3:13; 4:27; 13:28; 1 Tim. 6:13). He and his rule are also discussed in the historical writings of Philo (*Leg.* 299) and Josephus (*Antiquities* 18.2.2; 18.3.1; *Jewish War* 2.9.2), both of whom were Jewish writers from the first century CE. The only extant mention of Pilate in Roman literature is a brief reference by the historian Tacitus to the crucifixion of Jesus. Archaeology has added only one piece of information: a Latin inscription, found in Caesarea Maritima in 1961 refers to Pilate as a prefect (not procurator).

Historians often note that, since Pilate governed Judea for an unusually long term, the Roman government must not have been too displeased with his performance. Nevertheless, virtually everything known of the man must be reconstructed from Jewish and Christian

sources, which present him in a pejorative light. We have no records from those who might have held a different view.

In the Jewish Sources

Pilate's character is represented very negatively in the Jewish sources: he is presented as insensitive to Jewish religion and as all too ready to use brutal force to repress any dissent. He is also charged with incompetence and venality.

Josephus reports that, when Pilate first brought Roman troops to Jerusalem from Caesarea, he committed an unprecedented violation of Jewish sensibilities by allowing the troops to bring into the city their military standards with the busts of the emperor, which were considered idolatrous images by the Jews. This was done in an underhanded manner, the troops bringing in and setting up the busts by night. A massive protest in Caesarea's stadium forced the removal of the standards, but only after the Jews used tactics of nonviolent mass resistance, lying down and baring their necks when Pilate's soldiers, swords in hand, surrounded and attempted to disperse them.

Philo tells of an incident in which Jewish letters of protest to Rome brought the intervention of the emperor himself, who commanded Pilate to remove golden shields with the emperor's name on them that he had placed in his residence in Jerusalem.

Similar incidents, however, were not always resolved without bloodshed. Josephus again speaks of protests that broke out when Pilate appropriated temple funds to build an aqueduct for Jerusalem. On this occasion, Pilate had Roman soldiers, dressed as Jewish civilians and armed with hidden clubs, mingle with the shouting crowd and attack the people at a prearranged signal. Many were killed or hurt.

Finally, Josephus also mentions a slaughter of Samaritans in 35 CE, which apparently brought about Pilate's recall. A Samaritan prophet had gathered large numbers of his people to Mount Gerizim with the promise of showing them the holy vessels supposedly hidden there by Moses. Pilate treated the event as an insurrection and attacked the crowd with cavalry and heavy infantry, killing many in the battle and executing the leaders among the captured. Vitellius, the imperial legate to Syria, felt compelled to remove Pilate from office and send him to Rome to render account of his conduct.

This Samaritan massacre reported by Josephus is sometimes mentioned as an intriguing parallel to the incident mentioned in Luke 13:1, where Jesus was told about "the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices." Nothing else is recorded anywhere of the latter incident, but scholars note that such a slaughter would fit with the character of Pilate as described by Josephus in recounting the Samaritan incident.

In the Gospel Accounts

Pilate's part in the trial and execution of Jesus is the focus of most later interest in him. In general, the Synoptic Gospels present him as possibly weak and certainly cavalier about the administration of justice. He questions Jesus about the accusation that he claims to be the "King of the Jews" (Mark 15:2; cf. Matt. 27:11; Luke 23:3) and is amazed by Jesus's silence in response to charges brought against him (Mark 15:5; cf. Matt. 27:14). He knows that it is out of jealousy that Jesus's opponents have handed him over (Mark 15:10; cf. Matt. 27:18) and recognizes that there is no valid reason for his execution; still, he capitulates to the will of the people, sending Jesus to the cross (and setting Barabbas free), hoping that this will "satisfy the crowd" (Mark 15:14–15; cf. Luke 23:23–24) or, in Matthew, prevent a riot (Matt. 27:24). Later, Pilate gives the body of Jesus to Joseph of Arimathea (Mark 15:43–44; cf. Matt. 27:57–58; Luke 23:51–52); in Matthew's Gospel, Pilate allows for a guard to be placed at the tomb (Matt. 27:62–65).

Matthew's account also introduces Pilate's wife (not named in the Gospel but called Procla or Procula in later tradition). She warns Pilate to have nothing to do with "that innocent man," about whom she has had a dream (Matt. 27:19).

In addition, Matthew's Gospel includes an episode in which Pilate washes his hands before the people maintaining that, though he knows he is sentencing an innocent man to death, he will be free of responsibility for his blood; this prompts the people to respond, "His

blood be on us and on our children!” (27:24–25). The meaning of that exchange is debated but it seems to be part of a motif according to which Judas and the chief priests also attempt to avoid responsibility for Jesus’s blood (27:3–7). It seems unlikely that Matthew would have wanted to present Judas, the chief priests, and Pilate as somehow escaping condemnation, which fell instead on the people who Jesus supposedly came to save (cf. Matt. 1:21). Thus one prominent interpretation suggests that the attempt to avoid Jesus’s blood is ironic: Jesus’s blood brings forgiveness of sins (Matt. 26:28) and Pilate is depicted as foolishly cleansing himself of his only chance for salvation while the Jewish people in general are depicted as unwittingly praying for forgiveness.

Luke’s version of the story has Pilate send Jesus to Herod Antipas, whose soldiers mock him. Furthermore, in Luke’s account Pilate actually declares Jesus to be innocent three times (23:4, 14, 22). Many interpreters think that Luke wants to emphasize for Roman readers that Jesus was not actually a criminal—the Roman governor himself acknowledged this and so acted irresponsibly in having Jesus put to death.

In the Gospel of John, Pilate attempts to engage Jesus in a philosophical discussion over the definition of kingship (Jesus says his kingdom is “not from this world,” 18:36) and the nature of truth (Pilate asks, “What is truth?,” 18:38). Also, according to John, the Jewish opponents of Jesus need Pilate’s judgment against Jesus in

order to have him put to death. The problem, as John presents, is that (a) the Jews believe Jesus is guilty of blasphemy, which according to Jewish law merits the death penalty (19:7); but (b) they do not have the authority under Roman law to put anyone to death (18: 31); and (c) blasphemy is not a capital crime under Roman law. Therefore, they have to manipulate Pilate into passing judgment against Jesus for another reason, namely that he had set himself against the emperor (19:12; cf. 18:30).

In John, Pilate is also said to be afraid of Jesus, who has claimed to be the Son of God (19:7–8). Jesus makes clear that Pilate has no authority over him except that given from above (19:11): thus, in John, Pilate is depicted as a helpless pawn, but less a pawn of the Jewish authorities who want to manipulate him than a pawn of God, who is determining what must take place. In seeming recognition of this, Pilate has an inscription put on the cross that reads, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews,” and when the authorities object that it should read, “This man said, I am King of the Jews,” Pilate answers defiantly, “What I have written I have written” (19:19–22).

This article is adapted from an entry by Francisco O. Garcia-Treto and Mark Allan Powell in the *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011).

1.13

Herod and the Temple (Box 1.1)

The Jewish Roman historian Josephus reports, “In the fifteenth year of his reign, (Herod) restored the temple and, by erecting new foundation-walls, enlarged the surrounding area to double its former extent. The expenditure devoted to this work was incalculable, its magnificence never surpassed” (*Jewish War* 1.401).

Josephus, *Jewish War: Books 1–2*, trans. H. St. J. Thackeray, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927).

1.14

Tacitus on the *Pax Romana*: Whose *Pax*? (Box 1.2)

The *Pax Romana* was established through conquest. Calgacus, a Caledonian leader of one of the nations defeated to this end, remarked bitterly, “They create desolation and call it peace” (Tacitus, *Agricola* 30).

Tacitus, *Agricola*, trans. Harold Mattingly (New York: Penguin, 2009).

1.15

Ovid on Abortion in the Roman Empire

Although large families were typical in Jewish Palestine, low birth rates were more common in the Roman world, especially among the middle and upper classes. In some cases, the government actually took measures to increase population: bachelors might have to pay a tax or various concessions might be granted to parents who had three or more children.

Abortion was fairly common but not approved; that is, regardless of legality, it was a social disgrace. Women took responsibility for obtaining the procedure and, frequently, performed it on themselves with predictable results:

Ah, women, why will you thrust and pierce with the instrument, and give dire poisons to your children yet unborn? This neither the tigress has done in the jungles of Armenia, nor has the lioness had the heart to destroy her unborn young; Yet tender woman does it—but not unpunished—; oft she who slays her own in her bosom dies herself. She dies herself, and is borne to the pyre with hair unloosed, and all who behold cry out: “Tis her desert!” (Ovid, *Amores* 2.14.27–38 [ca. 16 BCE])

Ovid, *Heroides and Amores*, trans. Grant Showerman (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1921).

1.16

Josephus on the Destruction of Jerusalem

The Jewish Roman historian Josephus claims to have been present (among the Romans) when the siege of Jerusalem came to an end in 70 CE and the city was destroyed. He offers this account of the events:

While the holy house was on fire, every thing was plundered that came to hand, and ten thousand of those that were caught were slain; nor was there a commiseration of any age, or any reverence of gravity, but children, and old men, and profane persons, and priests were all slain in the same manner . . . the people also that were left above were beaten back upon the enemy, and under a great consternation, and made sad moans at the calamity they were under; the multitude also that was in the city joined in this outcry with those that were upon the hill. And besides, many of those that were worn away by the famine, and their mouths almost closed, when they saw the fire of the holy house, they exerted their utmost strength, and broke out into groans and outcries again. . . . Yet was the misery itself more terrible than this disorder; for one would have thought that the hill itself, on which the temple stood, was seething hot, as full of fire on every part of it, that the blood was larger in quantity than the fire, and those that were slain more in number than those that slew them; for the ground did no where appear visible, for the dead bodies that lay on it; but the soldiers went over

heaps of those bodies, as they ran upon such as fled from them.

(*Jewish War* 6.5.1.271–6)

Josephus, *Jewish War*, trans. William Whiston, available online through Project Gutenberg at www.josephus.org.

1.17

Pliny the Younger on Persecution of Christians

Around 112 CE, Pliny the Younger, a Roman governor, wrote to the emperor Trajan concerning the status of Christianity in Bithynia-Pontus, two regions in what is now Asia Minor (compare 1 Pet. 1:1). We also have a copy of the emperor's brief response to the governor.

Pliny's letter provides information about how Christianity is regarded by the government at the time. We learn that the new religion has been quite successful—and that this success is not pleasing to the government. Pliny notes that “many persons of every age, every rank, and also of both sexes” were associated with the faith. He complains that “the contagion of this superstition has spread not only to the cities but also to the villages and farms.” Further, it is clear that the religion is officially outlawed and that there can be severe repercussions for those who practice their faith. Pliny indicates that he follows a “Don't Ask, Don't Tell” policy that stops short of seeking out believers who might be worship Christ in private, but does target for persecution those who come to the government's attention.

Pliny the Younger to the Emperor Trajan

It is my practice, my lord, to refer to you all matters concerning which I am in doubt. For who can better give guidance to my hesitation or inform my ignorance? I have never participated in

trials of Christians. I therefore do not know what offenses it is the practice to punish or investigate, and to what extent. And I have been not a little hesitant as to whether there should be any distinction on account of age or no difference between the very young and the more mature; whether pardon is to be granted for repentance, or, if a man has once been a Christian, it does him no good to have ceased to be one; whether the name itself, even without offenses, or only the offenses associated with the name are to be punished.

Meanwhile, in the case of those who were denounced to me as Christians, I have observed the following procedure: I interrogated these as to whether they were Christians; those who confessed I interrogated a second and a third time, threatening them with punishment; those who persisted I ordered executed. For I had no doubt that, whatever the nature of their creed, stubbornness and inflexible obstinacy surely deserve to be punished. There were others possessed of the same folly; but because they were Roman citizens, I signed an order for them to be transferred to Rome.

Soon accusations spread, as usually happens, because of the proceedings going on, and several incidents occurred. An anonymous document was published containing the names of many persons. Those who denied that they were or had been Christians, when they invoked the gods in words dictated by me, offered prayer with incense and wine to your image, which I had ordered to be brought for this purpose together with statues of the gods, and moreover cursed Christ—none of which those who

are really Christians, it is said, can be forced to do—these I thought should be discharged. Others named by the informer declared that they were Christians, but then denied it, asserting that they had been but had ceased to be, some three years before, others many years, some as much as twenty-five years. They all worshipped your image and the statues of the gods, and cursed Christ.

They asserted, however, that the sum and substance of their fault or error had been that they were accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn and sing responsively a hymn to Christ as to a god, and to bind themselves by oath, not to some crime, but not to commit fraud, theft, or adultery, not falsify their trust, nor to refuse to return a trust when called upon to do so. When this was over, it was their custom to depart and to assemble again to partake of food—but ordinary and innocent food. Even this, they affirmed, they had ceased to do after my edict by which, in accordance with your instructions, I had forbidden political associations. Accordingly, I judged it all the more necessary to find out what the truth was by torturing two female slaves who were called deaconesses. But I discovered nothing else but depraved, excessive superstition.

I therefore postponed the investigation and hastened to consult you. For the matter seemed to me to warrant consulting you, especially because of the number involved. For many persons of every age, every rank, and also of both sexes are and will be endangered. For the contagion of this superstition has spread not only to the cities but also to the villages and farms. But it

seems possible to check and cure it. It is certainly quite clear that the temples, which had been almost deserted, have begun to be frequented, that the established religious rites, long neglected, are being resumed, and that from everywhere sacrificial animals are coming, for which until now very few purchasers could be found. Hence it is easy to imagine what a multitude of people can be reformed if an opportunity for repentance is afforded.¹

Trajan to Pliny the Younger

You observed proper procedure, my dear Pliny, in sifting the cases of those who had been denounced to you as Christians. For it is not possible to lay down any general rule to serve as a kind of fixed standard. They are not to be sought out; if they are denounced and proved guilty, they are to be punished, with this reservation, that whoever denies that he is a Christian and really proves it—that is, by worshipping our gods—even though he was under suspicion in the past, shall obtain pardon through repentance. But anonymously posted accusations ought to have no place in any prosecution. For this is both a dangerous kind of precedent and out of keeping with the spirit of our age.²

1. Pliny the Younger, *Letters*, trans. William Melmoth, rev. F. C. T. Bosanquet, available online through Project Gutenberg at

<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2811/2811-h/2811-h.htm>.

2. Pliny the Younger, *Letters*.

1.18

Church and State: The Ethic of Resistance

Biblical studies on how the New Testament perceives church-state relationships identify three distinct stances that are commended in different New Testament writings:

1. the ethic of subordination (found in the letters of Paul and in 1 Peter)
2. the ethic of resistance (found in Johannine writings and, especially, Revelation)
3. the ethic of critical distancing (found in the Synoptic Gospels)

Here we look at the ethic of resistance. For the other two views, see 1.19 and 1.20.

Summary Description of the Ethic of Resistance

In the Gospel of John,

We hear that Jesus's coming is a judgment on the world (9:39; 12:31), which is inhabited by sons of darkness (12:35–36); for the world is incompatible with Jesus (16:20; 17:14, 16; 18:36) and with his Spirit (14:17; 16:8–11). In short, the world hates Jesus and his followers (7:7; 15:18–19; 16:20). Jesus refuses to pray for the world (17:9); rather, he overcomes the world (16:33) and drives out the Satanic Prince of this world (12:31; 14:30).¹

In the book of Revelation, the political implications of such a view are drawn out, as political structures are understood to be instruments of demonic injustice and of profound misuse of wealth and power. In response, the church is encouraged to withdraw from society in every possible way, to avoid any compromise with worldly powers, and to strive to implement what is godly in direct opposition to that which an ungodly society seeks to produce.²

Key Texts Expressive of This Ethic

John 15:18–19:

(Jesus says) “If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you. If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. Because you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world—therefore the world hates you.”

1 John 2:15–17:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. The love of the Father is not in those who love the world; for all that is in the world—the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches—comes not from the Father but from the world. And the world and its desire are passing away, but those who do the will of God live forever.

Revelation chapters 13, 17, 18:

In Revelation 13 the seer paints his apocalyptic portrait of the state with the image of two beasts. . . . The first beast arises out

of the sea (13:1), the symbol of chaos, the abyss of demonic forces. Its claim to authority is derived from the dragon (Satan), from whom the beast has received absolute power and domination. This is the great Antichrist, the empire itself and the individual emperors who rule. . . . The second beast arises out of the earth (13:11) and acts wholly under the authority of and in the service of the first beast (13:12). John is describing the local and regional representatives of Rome in Asia Minor who promote the imperial cult and who otherwise serve as puppets of the imperial regime. . . . A second image of the imperial state is the great whore. The image first appears in Revelation 17. This is Rome, the eternal city, the invincible conqueror of the world. But in John's vivid imagination, the imperial whore is the great seducer and corrupter of the earth—and she is “drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the witnesses to Jesus” (17:6). . . . The third image of the state in Revelation is Babylon. All of Revelation 18 revolves around the fall of Babylon, and 18:9–20 presents three laments by those who had gained most from Babylon's wealth and power: The first lament comes from the kings of the earth, condemned for living in luxury. . . . The second lament comes from the merchants, who benefitted from an international commerce that created abundant wealth for a relatively small minority while the masses of the empire's population lived in dire poverty. . . . The third lament comes from the shipbuilders and those who prospered from their trade.³

Some Common Observations Regarding This Ethic

- The apparent antipathy to the world in the Gospel of John must be balanced by John's assertion that "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son" and by the insistence that "God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him" (John 3:16–17).
- The counsel to avoid the world in the Johannine Gospel and epistles is not articulated with specific reference to politics or to governmental affairs. The main concern seems to be moral: Christians are not to live in the same way that those who "belong to the world" are apt to live.
- The book of Revelation is usually understood as depicting church and state relations during a time of crisis, when the church is experiencing persecution from the state. The question is asked whether the response of the church presented there would be appropriate "for all seasons."

Walter Pilgrim observes,

Revelation does not teach an escapist ethic of irresponsibility toward history. Instead, it intends to motivate and encourage action toward greater justice on behalf of suffering believers and all humanity. And though it advocates resistance, it is nonviolent resistance patterned after the suffering of the Lamb.⁴

1. Raymond Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 63.

2. Walter Pilgrim, *Uneasy Neighbors: Church and State in the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 151–61.
3. Pilgrim, *Uneasy Neighbors*, 152.
4. Pilgrim, *Uneasy Neighbors*, 178.

1.19

Church and State: The Ethic of Subordination

Biblical studies on “how the New Testament perceives church-state relationships” identify three distinct stances that are commended in different New Testament writings:

1. the ethic of subordination (found in the letters of Paul and in 1 Peter)
2. the ethic of resistance (found in Johannine writings and, especially, Revelation)
3. the ethic of critical distancing (found in the Synoptic Gospels)

Here we look at the ethic of subordination. For the other two views, see 1.18 and 1.20.

Summary Description of the Ethic of Subordination

The government is understood to be a gift of God, divinely established for the common good. Its God-given purpose is to encourage and maintain what is beneficial for our life together and to discourage what is harmful and disruptive. Or, put another way, the state is God’s instrument in the human community to preserve law and order and to promote justice and peace. Its power consists in its responsibility to exercise its authority toward these beneficial ends. Christians, in turn, owe to the government their loyalty and respect. Because government is a divine gift they support its preservation of the good and opposition to evil,

pray for those in authority, pay taxes, and try to live as model citizens of human communities. In so doing they act in accordance with God's intent. Conversely, to resist the state is to risk both punishment and divine disapproval.¹

Key Texts Expressive of the Ethic of Subordination

Sirach 10:4 (second-century-BCE deuterocanonical/apocryphal writing):

The government of the earth is in the hand of the Lord, and over it he will raise up the right leader for the time.

Romans 13:1–6:

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore, whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval; for it is God's servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore, one must be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience. For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, busy with this very thing. Pay to all what is due them—taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due.

Titus 3:1–2:

Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show every courtesy to everyone.

1 Peter 2:13–17:

For the Lord's sake accept the authority of every human institution, whether of the emperor as supreme, or of governors, as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing right you should silence the ignorance of the foolish. As servants of God, live as free people, yet do not use your freedom as a pretext for evil. Honor everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

Some Common Observations regarding the Ethic of Subordination

- According to Walter Pilgrim, this position has been the dominant one for Christian history.
- The position may derive in some sense from the fourth (Calvinist fifth) commandment. Note, for example, Martin Luther's explanation of that commandment in his *Small Catechism*:

Honor your father and mother.

Question: What does this mean?

Answer: We are to fear and love God so that we do not despise or anger our parents *and others in authority*, but respect, obey, love, and esteem them.

- When Paul wrote Romans 13:1–7, he probably thought that the end of the world was near. Would it affect his position if he knew otherwise? Consider:
 1. Titus and 1 Peter are less informed by such eschatological urgency.
 2. Holders of other views also thought the end of the world was near.
 3. Should eschatological urgency be regarded as a first-century mistake or as a characteristic intrinsic to Christian theology?
- The Romans text was probably written around 55 CE, during the reign of Nero (54–68), who would later persecute Christians horribly and have Paul put to death by the sword. However, during the early years of Nero’s rule, conditions in Rome were favorable for Christians.
- The word translated “be subject to” in Romans 13:1 (*hypotassein*) implies some degree of mutuality or reciprocal obligation. It is elsewhere used of wives to husbands. Some have suggested “be subordinate to” as a better translation, the key point being to recognize one’s proper position or role within the social structure.

- It is interesting that the Romans text does not use the word “obey” (*peitharchein*) with regard to governing authorities. That word is used in Titus 3:5 but not with the authorities as its obvious object. The only New Testament text using the word “obey” with explicit reference to governing authorities is Acts 5:29: “Peter and the apostles answered, ‘We must obey God rather than any human authority.’”
- Is Paul’s counsel in Romans specific to some particular situation? Some have suggested that he wanted to discourage Roman Christians from taking part in the sort of revolt against the empire undertaken by Jewish nationalists in the late 60s.
- The claim that God instituted all governing authorities appears to be in tension with views expressed elsewhere in the New Testament. For example, in Luke 4:6 the devil says to Jesus that authority over all the kingdoms of the world “has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please.”
- This counsel regarding submission to governing authorities seems to be based entirely on an assumption of good and just government, which wields the power of the sword to reward good and punish wrong. Does Paul mean to indicate that this is always the case (evident or not) or does he mean to offer counsel that would be appropriate only when that is in fact the case?

1. Walter Pilgrim, *Uneasy Neighbors: Church and State in the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 7.

1.20

Church and State: The Ethic of Critical Distancing

Biblical studies on “how the New Testament perceives church-state relationships” identify three distinct stances that are commended in different New Testament writings:

1. the ethic of subordination (found in the letters of Paul and in 1 Peter)
2. the ethic of resistance (found in Johannine writings and, especially, Revelation)
3. the ethic of critical distancing (found in the Synoptic Gospels)

Here we look at the ethic of critical distancing. For the other two views, see 1.18 and 1.19.

Summary Description of the Ethic of Critical Distancing

The Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels models an approach to governing authorities that avoids both the sort of submissive subordination to the state evident in Romans 13 and the uncompromising demonizing of the state evident in Revelation 13.

On the one hand, Jesus accepts the powers that be, both Jewish and Roman. He is no political revolutionary, no Zealot, no advocate of a theocracy created by human hands or political force. He does not preach the overthrow of the political order or armed revolt. He even permits the payment of tax to Caesar and

to the Temple hierarchy. Above all, he teaches a radical love ethic that includes forgiveness and love for the enemy and nonviolent resistance to evil.

On the other hand, Jesus is no servile subject to those who rule. Although he accepts the political order, his allegiance is to God and God alone. Accordingly, his life from beginning to end is a history of conflict with those in power. He criticizes those who abuse and misuse their power, wealth, and position. He allows the tax to Caesar but along with it calls for a higher obedience to the things of God.¹

Key Texts Expressive of the Ethic of Critical Distancing

Mark 10:42–44:

Jesus called them and said to them, “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.”

Matthew 5:38–44:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also . . . You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy’ . . . But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”

Mark 12:13–17:

Then they sent to [Jesus] some Pharisees and some Herodians to trap him in what he said. And they came and said to him, “Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality, but teach the way of God in accordance with truth. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not? Should we pay them, or should we not?” But knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, “Why are you putting me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me see it.” And they brought one. Then he said to them, “Whose head is this, and whose title?” They answered, “The emperor’s.” Jesus said to them, “Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”

Common Observations regarding the Ethic of Critical Distancing

Walter Pilgrim says,

Disciples of Christ always live on the thin edge of compromise as they use and misuse the coins and systems of Caesar, whether in the political, economic, or military realm. One can give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and seek to determine what is appropriate for Caesar. Yet it is significant to note that in this story Jesus does not call Caesar a servant of God nor claim that earthly rulers are instituted by God and so worthy of obedience.²

Jesus may evince an ethic of critical distancing for the time in which he lives, but he also speaks of a future time when his followers will

be dragged before governors and kings who persecute them violently; he tells of anti-Christ's who will come and of a desolating sacrilege to be set up in the holy place (see Mark 13). His counsel then is to "flee to the mountains" (13:14) and hope for the time when the Son of Man will send out his angels to gather his elect (13:27).

1. Walter Pilgrim, *Uneasy Neighbors: Church and State in the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 123.
2. Pilgrim, *Uneasy Neighbors*, 72.

2.0

Background Information for Understanding the New Testament

The world of the New Testament is so different from our own that we may find its concepts, customs, and terminology confusing. Bible dictionaries, commentaries, and encyclopedias offer explanations for such matters. Here is a sampling of what one might learn about certain aspects of the New Testament world:

anointing: the application of ointment or oil to a body or object.

Kings were anointed with oil at their coronation (cf. Luke 4:18); the sick sometimes were anointed with oil to accompany prayers for their healing (Mark 6:13; James 5:14); a host might anoint a favored guest with some sort of fragrant ointment (Luke 7:38, 46; John 11:2; 12:3–6); mourners anointed corpses with scented oils to remove the stench of death (Mark 16:1; John 12:7–8); the term “messiah” means “Anointed One” (John 1:41), and Christians seized on the ambiguity of whether this meant “anointed to rule” or “anointed to die” (Mark 14:8).

betrothal: a marriage that had not yet been consummated. A couple who had been betrothed were legally married—the relationship could be ended only by divorce—but they did not yet live in a sexual relationship as a married couple. Reasons for such an intermediate state included: (1) the wife was underage; (2) the

dowry had not yet been paid (thus the man had essentially reserved a woman to be his wife but was not allowed to take her to his home until he had paid for her); (3) the bride and/or groom's family needed more time and money to prepare a proper wedding. See Matthew 1:18.

carpenter: construction worker or builder who worked with wood or stone. Jesus is identified as a carpenter (in Greek, *tektōn*) in Mark 6:3 and as the son of a carpenter in Matthew 13:55. It is possible that Jesus (and Joseph) had a carpenter shop in which they made wooden doors and furniture for the mud-brick houses in their village. However, many scholars think that the term “carpenter” was used for common laborers who worked on Roman construction projects. The village of Nazareth may have been a community for such persons, providing opportunity for them to work in the nearby city of Sepphoris.

centurion: a Roman army officer in charge of one hundred soldiers. See Matthew 8:5–13; 27:54; Mark 15:39, 44–45; Luke 7:2, 6; 23:47; Acts 10; 21:31–32; 22:25–26; 23:17, 23; 24:23; 27.

corban: literally, “given to God,” the practice of setting aside for religious purposes what typically was used in another way (cf. Lev. 1:2; Num. 7:13). Jesus criticizes the Pharisees for encouraging people to declare as “corban” money that they should use to care for their elderly parents. See Mark 7:11–13.

crucifixion: a Roman form of execution designed to terrorize subjugated populations. Men and women were nailed or tied naked to wooden stakes (sometimes with cross beams) and left to die of asphyxiation when the weight of their hanging body made breathing impossible (this took several hours). Sometimes the victim was seated on a small block to prevent asphyxiation, and death from exposure then took several days. The exact manner of crucifixion varied and may have been left to the discretion of soldiers, but the goal was to cause maximum torment and humiliation and to do so in public view as a warning to others. Crucifixion generally was reserved for lower classes or enemies of the state. Bodies normally were left on the crosses to be consumed by scavengers. See Matthew 27:33–60; Mark 15:22–46; Luke 23:33–53; John 19:16–42.

cubit: a common (though somewhat inconsistent) unit for measuring distance. A cubit (in Greek, *pēchys*) was equal to the span from a typical man's elbow to the tip of his middle finger (about 17.5 to 20 inches). See Revelation 21:17; see also the KJV of Matthew 6:27; Luke 12:25; John 21:8.

denarius: a silver coin that was the usual day's wage for a typical laborer. See Matthew 18:28; 20:2, 9–10, 13; 22:19; Mark 6:37; 12:15; 14:5; Luke 7:41; 10:35; 20:24; John 6:7; 12:5; Revelation 6:6.

first watch: roughly six to nine o'clock at night. Likewise, the second watch is nine o'clock to midnight, the third watch from midnight to three o'clock in the morning, and the fourth watch from three o'clock to dawn (i.e., 6 a.m.). The idea was to divide the time between sunset (around 6 p.m.) and sunrise (around 6 a.m.) into four equal segments. The NRSV often does not translate these literally; see the KJV or RSV of Mark 6:48; Luke 12:38.

hem/fringe of garment: the four tassels that devout Jewish men wore at the corners of their outer garment. These tassels had symbolic meaning, with different-colored threads standing for various thoughts, but they served generically to remind the wearer of an obligation to keep the Torah. Jesus criticizes the Pharisees for wearing ostentatious tassels on their garments (Matt. 23:5), but apparently he wore less showy ones himself (Matt. 9:20; Mark 6:56).

lamp: the most common means of providing light at night (people did not have wax candles). A simple receptacle, usually made of pottery, was filled with oil, and a lit wick could be dropped in to float. Lamps were portable, but they also could be placed on a tall stand to emit maximum light in a particular area. See Matthew 5:15; 6:22; 25:1–8; Mark 4:21; Luke 11:33–36; 12:35; 15:8; John 5:35; Acts 20:8; Hebrews 9:2; 2 Peter 1:19; Revelation 1:12–20; 2:1–5; 11:4; 18:23; 21:23; 22:5.

leprosy: not the illness that we know as Hansen’s disease, but rather any disfigurement on the surface of a person or thing, including mildew on clothing, mold on a house, or rust on metal. With humans, it could include a range of disfiguring conditions, from birthmarks to acne to more severe and debilitating skin diseases. See Matthew 8:2–3; 10:8; 11:4–5; 26:6; Mark 1:40–45; 14:3; Luke 4:27; 5:12–13; 7:22; 17:12–19.

magi: Persian sages or religious leaders who practiced a mixture of sorcery and astrology. The Jewish people in New Testament times identified the sorcerers in Pharaoh’s court as magi (Exod. 7–9) along with Balaam (Num. 22–24) and Nebuchadnezzar’s ineffective dream interpreters (Dan. 2). In the New Testament, magi are found in Matthew 2; Acts 8:9–24; 13:6–12.

money changer: a person who exchanged one type of coin for another, extracting a small fee for the service. The motivation for such exchanges was religious: coins minted by the Romans usually bore images that made them unacceptable for use by pious Jews. Money changers functioned in the temple court (not inside the temple itself) so that temple-goers who wanted to make offerings or purchase animals for sacrifices could obtain untainted coins. See Mark 11:15.

oath: either a vow or an utterance of profanity. The first sense seems to predominate in biblical references: when people “swear,” they usually are swearing an oath or vow to do something (Jesus

forbids this in Matt. 5:33–37; see also Matt. 23:16–22; 26:63; Mark 6:23, 26; Acts 18:18; 23:12–14, 21–23; Heb. 6:13–18; 7:20–21, 28; James 5:12; Rev. 10:6). In a few instances, swearing might refer to the use of profanity (see Mark 14:71 KJV), which for Jewish people sometimes involved vulgar use of God’s name and was, by some reports, quite common.

phylacteries: a pair of small boxes containing passages of Scripture written on parchment, worn by devout Jewish men, one bound to the forehead and the other strapped to the wrist, so that the Torah might always be at their right hand and before their eyes (see Exod. 13:9, 16; Deut. 6:8; 11:18). Jesus criticizes the Pharisees for displaying their piety by wearing phylacteries that he considered to be excessively large (Matt. 23:5).

pinnacle of the temple: the summit of the Jerusalem temple, as reconstructed by Herod the Great in the years just prior to Jesus’s birth. The pinnacle of the Jerusalem temple is believed to have been the highest architectural point in the world at the time. It was destroyed (along with the rest of the temple) by Titus, son of the Roman emperor Vespasian, in 70 CE. See Matthew 4:5; 24:1.

prison: the purpose of imprisonment was not reform or punishment, but rather to confine a person awaiting trial. After trial, a guilty prisoner was punished or executed, not sentenced to further confinement. Prison conditions varied greatly, from dark dungeons to house arrest. See Matthew 11:2; 14:3; 25:36–44; Luke 21:12;

Acts 4:3; 5:17–25; 8:3; 12:4–19; 16:23–24; 21:33–26:32; Romans 16:7; 2 Corinthians 11:23; Ephesians 3:1; 4:1; Philippians 1:7, 13; Colossians 4:3, 10; 2 Timothy 1:8; Philemon 1, 9; Hebrews 13:3; Revelation 2:10.

prostitutes: female slaves forced to perform sexual services for the financial benefit of their masters. In Roman cities there may have been professional “high class” prostitutes, but in the areas of Palestine that serve as settings for New Testament stories all prostitutes appear to have been slaves; thus we hear of no ex-prostitutes (specifically, Mary Magdalene is never said to be a prostitute). See Matthew 21:31–32; Luke 7:36–50. New Testament passages that speak of prostitutes as immoral persons (rather than as marginalized outcasts) refer to persons outside Palestine, in a “far country” (Luke 15:13, 30) or in notorious Corinth (1 Cor. 6:9, 15–16).

Roman citizenship: was obtained by being born a Roman citizen, and otherwise was granted only by the emperor or his designated representatives. Benefits of citizenship included: one was accountable only to imperial law rather than to local statutes (which varied throughout the empire); one could not be subjected to torture or corporal punishment without a trial; if accused of a crime, one could appeal to Caesar to have the case heard in Rome. See Acts 16:37; 22:25–29; 23:27.

Sabbath day's journey: the distance that one was allowed to travel on the Sabbath without violating religious observation of that day as a time for rest. The actual distance prescribed is no longer known, and it may have varied with time and place. See Acts 1:12; cf. Matthew 24:20.

Sanhedrin: a council of Jewish leaders that met in Jerusalem. In the New Testament, both Pharisees and Sadducees are said to sit on the Sanhedrin, which is also described as being composed of “chief priests, scribes, and elders.” See Mark 14:55; 15:1, 43; John 11:47; Acts 4:5–21; 5:21–42; 6:12–15; 22:5, 30; 23:1–10, 12–22.

shepherd: usually an itinerant or migrant worker hired to care for sheep and goats. In New Testament times, the profession of shepherd was a low-class position, near the bottom of the social scale. It was a dirty, demanding, and dangerous job that most people would not pursue if they were capable of finding better work. Shepherds appear to have been particularly despised by the religious establishment, perhaps because they violated Sabbath and purity regulations. See Matthew 18:12–14; 25:32; Mark 6:34; 14:27; Luke 2:8–20; John 10:1–16; Acts 20:28; Hebrews 13:20; 1 Peter 2:25; 5:4; Revelation 7:17.

slavery: could result from a sentence of punishment for various offenses; slavery was not always permanent. Entire families were sold into slavery when someone defaulted on a debt. Between

one-fourth and one-third of the people in the Roman Empire were slaves. Conditions varied enormously from agreeable to appalling. Nevertheless, a slave was a person with no honor, a person who literally lived in disgrace.

sowing seed: the agricultural practice of planting. In ancient Palestine the process seems to have been the reverse of what we are familiar with: first, the seed was thrown on the ground; then the ground was plowed, allowing the plow to work the previously scattered seed into the soil. See Mark 4:3–20; cf. Matthew 6:26; 13:24–43; 25:24, 26; Mark 4:31–32; John 4:36–37; 1 Corinthians 9:11; 15:36–37, 42–44; 2 Corinthians 9:6, 10; Galatians 6:7–8; James 3:18.

stadion: a somewhat inconsistent unit of measurement equal to six hundred feet (a foot being, literally, the length of a man’s foot). The NRSV avoids using the term, instead translating measurements given in stadia into equivalent feet or miles; the KJV uses “furlongs”; other versions use “stadia” in some cases. See Luke 24:13; John 6:19; 11:18; Revelation 14:20; 21:16.

swaddling clothes: linen wrapped tightly around a small child’s body to restrict its movements. In certain cultures it is common to swaddle a baby by rolling it in cloth with its arms at its sides. See Luke 2:7.

talent: a unit of silver, measured by weight, approximately seventy-five pounds of silver by our reckoning. One talent was equal to six thousand denarii. See Matthew 18:23–35; 25:14–30.

tax collector: native citizen of a conquered territory hired by the Romans to collect taxes for the empire. Tax collectors were viewed as traitors and usually were suspected of skimming money by collecting more than was actually due and keeping the surplus for themselves. Some of the tax collectors in the New Testament (e.g., Matthew) appear to have been specifically assigned to collect tolls for the use of Roman roads. See Matthew 5:46; 9:9–12; 10:3; 11:19; 18:17; 21:31–32; Luke 3:12–14; 7:29; 15:1; 18:10–14; 19:1–10.

temple tax: an annual payment to support the temple in Jerusalem. It was completely voluntary, but devout Jews throughout the Roman Empire were expected to pay it as an act of piety. Roman law allowed Jews who opted to pay this tax to deduct the amount from whatever civic taxes they owed to the empire. See Matthew 17:24–27.

third hour: roughly nine o'clock in the morning. Likewise, the sixth hour is noon, the ninth hour is three o'clock in the afternoon, and the eleventh hour is about five o'clock. The basic thought seems to be that the workday begins at sunrise (around 6 a.m.) and ends at sunset (around 6 p.m.), but the hours are numbered according to when they conclude rather than when they start (the third hour

ends at 9 a.m.; the sixth hour ends at noon). The NRSV frequently does not translate these references literally but instead substitutes the appropriate modern reference. See the KJV, NIV, or RSV of Matthew 20:3, 5–6, 9; Mark 15:25, 33; John 1:39; 4:6, 52; 19:14; Acts 2:15; 3:1; 10:3, 9; cf. John 11:9.

winnowing grain: the practice of tossing grain into the air with a large fork or fan so that the wind will blow away dust and other lightweight impurities, the chaff. See Matthew 3:12.

2.1

Basic New Testament Chronology (Box 2.1)

63 BCE	Pompey conquers Jerusalem for Rome
ca. 6–4 BCE	birth of Jesus
ca. 30–33 CE	crucifixion of Jesus
ca. 32–36 CE	Paul becomes a follower of Christ
ca. 46–65 CE	Paul's missionary journeys and imprisonment (as recorded in Acts); Paul's letters written during this period
ca. 62–65 CE	martyrdom of Peter and Paul in Rome
ca. 65–73 CE	Gospel of Mark written
66 CE	outbreak of Jewish war with Rome
70 CE	destruction of the Jerusalem temple
73 CE	fall of Masada—definitive end of the Jewish war
ca. 80–100 CE	other New Testament books written: Matthew, Luke, John, Acts, and “second-generation” letters by followers of the original apostles

2.2

Pharisees and Sadducees (Box 2.3)

Pharisees	Sadducees
generally middle class	mainly upper class
power base outside Jerusalem	power base in Jerusalem
closely associated with synagogues	closely associated with the temple
primarily teachers and scholars	primarily priests
theologically committed to maintaining Israel's relationship with God through obedience to the law	theologically committed to maintaining Israel's relationship with God through the sacrificial system
accepted as Scripture most of what Christians call the "Old Testament"	accepted only the Torah (Pentateuch) as Scripture
believed in resurrection of humans to a life beyond death	did not believe in resurrection to a life beyond death
recognized existence of spiritual beings, including angels and demons	skeptical of beliefs regarding different spiritual beings
regarded as social moderates who objected to imposition of Roman authority but did not advocate armed revolt against the Roman powers	regarded as social conservatives who sought collaboration with Roman authorities in ways that would ensure their own place in the status quo
prominent Pharisees: Shammai (strict interpretations of law), Hillel (more lenient interpretations of law)	prominent Sadducees: Caiaphas and Annas, identified as high priests during the lifetime of Jesus
in the New Testament they argue with Jesus over matters of law but are only peripherally connected to the plot to have Jesus put to death	in the New Testament they are the primary architects of the plot to have Jesus put to death
the primary forebears of modern Judaism	disappear from history after the disastrous Jewish war with Rome in 66–73 CE

2.3

New Testament References to Samaritans

Matthew 10:5	Jesus instructs his disciples not to take their ministry to any city of the Samaritans.
Luke 9:52–55	Jesus rebukes his disciples after they want to call fire down from heaven to consume a Samaritan village that would not receive them.
Luke 10:30–37	Jesus tells the parable of “the Good Samaritan.”
Luke 17:11	Jesus passes through Samaria on his way from Galilee to Jerusalem.
Luke 17:12–19	Jesus heals ten lepers, and the only one who returns to give thanks is a Samaritan.
John 4:4–42	Jesus converses with a Samaritan woman at a well; other Samaritans persuade him to stay with them for two days, and they acknowledge him as the Savior of the world.
John 8:48	Some Jews accuse Jesus of being a Samaritan (after he has suggested that they are not the true children of Abraham).
Acts 1:8	Jesus says that his disciples are to be his witnesses “in Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”
Acts 8:5–25	Many Samaritans, including Simon Magus, accept baptism from Philip the evangelist; Peter and John bring the gift of the Spirit to the Samaritan converts and preach the gospel to many Samaritan villages.

2.4

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2.5

Dead Sea Scrolls

The Dead Sea Scrolls are a collection of over eight hundred manuscripts discovered by archaeologists in several caves around the Dead Sea. The first scrolls were found in 1947, and many more were unearthed in the ensuing years. The manuscripts had been stored in sealed jars, and some care had been taken to preserve them, most likely by the Essenes, who apparently operated a monastic community in the area. The manuscripts date from the New Testament era or slightly before. Among the finds, in addition to a wealth of liturgical materials:

- **manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible** (Old Testament), including parts of every book, except Esther and Nehemiah, and also many books of the Apocrypha; most of these are over a thousand years older than any copies of these books that we possessed previously
- **numerous biblical commentaries** (called *pesharim*) that interpret passages in psalms and prophetic works as predictions of what would happen to the community
- **the *Temple Scroll***, a work that reinterprets and systematizes laws from the Pentateuch in a manner analogous to the much later Jewish Talmud; perhaps this was similar to what the

Pharisees also did orally in their “tradition of the elders” (Matt. 15:2)

- **the *Community Rule* and the *Damascus Document***, two works that spell out regulations for the sect: procedures for joining, duties of members, qualifications for leadership, disciplinary policies, and so forth
- **the *War Scroll***, an apocalyptic work that provides a blueprint for an imminent end-time conflict, describing how the children of light will triumph over the children of darkness
- **the *Messianic Rule***, a handbook for the future that details life in a postwar righteous community ruled by two messiahs, one a king and the other a priest

2.6

The Septuagint

The Septuagint (pronounced sep'too-uh-jint) is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible that was widely used by many Jews in the Roman Empire. The translation appears to have been made in the third century BCE in Alexandria, though revisions continued for some time after that.

Why Is It Called the “Septuagint”?

The name Septuagint comes from the Greek word for “seventy” and the traditional abbreviation for the Septuagint is LXX, seventy in Roman numerals. This name is consistent with a legend that seventy scholars were involved in the work: each translated the Scriptures independently and, miraculously, they produced seventy identical translations.

The origin of this legend is difficult to trace. The closest we find in ancient literature is a tradition recounted in the *Letter of Aristeas*, which says that seventy-two Jewish translators were brought to Egypt by Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285–246 BCE) to translate the Pentateuch. Why the number seventy-two was rounded off to seventy in later versions of the Septuagint legend is uncertain, but it may have seemed appropriate, since seventy elders had accompanied Moses up the mountain to receive the Torah from God (Exod. 24:1, 9).

The Septuagint's Challenge to "Hebrew Old Testament Tradition"

Old Testament scholars are mainly interested in the LXX because of its impact on establishing the original text of the Bible. For centuries, the standard Hebrew text used for all editions and translations of the Christian Bible (as well as for Jewish translations of their Scriptures) was "the Masoretic text." Scholars had always noted that the LXX did not appear to be a translation of that standard text. Sometimes, material was presented in a completely different order in the LXX than in the Masoretic Hebrew text and, at other times, there were significant omissions or additions.

Various explanations for the discrepancies were offered but, in any case, consensus held that biblical translations should be based on the Hebrew text (i.e., the Masoretic text) and not on a sometimes idiosyncratic Greek translation of the Hebrew text.

The matter got more complicated when the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in the late 1940s. Among the documents found in Qumran were numerous manuscripts of the LXX as well as Hebrew manuscripts of the Bible that preserved a tradition older than any extant copies of the Masoretic text. Comparison of these documents determined that the LXX frequently preserves a translation of an earlier version of Hebrew books than that which had traditionally been used to prepare translations and editions of Jewish and Christian Bibles. To take one example, the book of Jeremiah is one-

eighth shorter in the LXX than in the Masoretic text. Is this because the LXX translation was done from a defective copy of the book? Or was the LXX translation done from a version closer to the original, before material was added to the book by later scribes? Scholars tend to think the latter scenario is more likely, though the longer version of Jeremiah continues to be appear in modern Bibles.

Today, the LXX is regularly consulted in production of biblical translations and it is regarded as a valuable resource in resolving textual difficulties. There is continued discussion as to whether (or when) LXX readings should be given precedence over the Masoretic text; frequently, alternative readings are simply noted in footnotes to the text, in comments included in study Bibles. Deeper discussion is reserved for academic biblical commentaries.

Importance for New Testament Study

The LXX was the biblical text from which the New Testament writers, who wrote in Greek, quoted most often. Moreover, the translation of Hebrew words into Greek resulted in Greek words taking on Hebraic meanings, a fact of some significance for the interpretation of the New Testament. For example, the Greek word for “grace” (*charis*) came to mean “God’s benevolence” because it was used to translate Hebrew *hesed*, whereas in Greek literature before the LXX it had no particular religious significance.

2.7

Aramaic Expressions in the New Testament

The language spoken by Jesus and his disciples in their daily lives was not Hebrew, Greek, or Latin but Aramaic (pronounced air´uh-may´ik), the Semitic language originally associated with the Arameans of northern Syria. The latter are said to be among the ancestors of Abraham (Gen. 28:2–5; Deut. 26:5) but Aramaic does not become significant as a biblical language until late in the Old Testament period. It appears to have developed the ninth century BCE (well after the time of Abraham) and to have gained currency during the time of the Assyrian empire (eighth to fourth centuries BCE) when Aramean scribes exercised considerable influence. The language continued in widespread use in a number of dialects through the New Testament period until the Arab conquest (seventh century CE). The Dead Sea Scrolls, inscriptions, and many documents show that Aramaic was in common use during the first century CE.

Although the Old Testament is written mainly in Hebrew, a few passages are in Aramaic (Ezra 4:8–6:18; 7:12–26; Dan. 2:4–7:28; Jer. 10:10–11; Gen. 31:47); these are all assumed to be late additions to the body of Jewish Scriptures, probably composed after the return from exile.

A handful of Aramaic words and phrases occur in the New Testament. Most of these occur on the lips of Jesus, and there is a strong likelihood that oral tradition has remembered his exact words in those instances (otherwise, the Gospels, written in Greek, present translations of what Jesus or others said). In other instances, Aramaic words recall names of people or places. In one instance, Paul uses an Aramaic word (“Maranatha”) that seems a little out of place in a Greek letter written to gentiles—perhaps the word had entered Christian discourse because it had been used by Jesus or his Galilean followers.

Aramaic Expressions in the New Testament

Boanerges	Mark 3:17	“Sons of Thunder”
talitha cum	Mark 5:41	“Little girl, get up”
Corban	Mark 7:11	“an offering to God”
Ephphatha	Mark 7:34	“Be opened”
Bartimaeus	Mark 10:46	“son of Timaeus”
Abba	Mark 14:36; Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6	“Father”
Golgotha	Matthew 27:33; Mark 15:22; John 19:17	“the place of a skull”
Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani? or Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?	Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34	“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”
Maranatha	1 Corinthians 16:22 (NASB, KJV)	“Our Lord, come”

2.8

Commerce in the New Testament Period

New Testament authors maintain that the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil (1 Tim. 6:10) and that no one can serve both God and wealth (Matt. 6:24). With such attitudes as these, not to mention the many attacks on those who are wealthy (e.g., Mark 10:25; Luke 6:24–28; 12:13–21; 16:19–31; 1 Tim. 1:10; 3:3; 6:9–10, 17–19), it might be surprising to find that the New Testament also provides detailed information about commerce and economic life. Here, we present information organized according to three geographical divisions of the Greco-Roman world: the city, the countryside, and the wilderness.

Commerce in the City

The city (in Greek, *polis*) was the scene of many economic institutions and roles. In the marketplace, retailers (2 Cor. 2:17) displayed wares of all sorts: purple cloth (Acts 16:14), swords (Luke 22:36), oil for lamps (Matt. 25:9), linen and spices for burial (Mark 15:46; 16:1), pearls of great price (Matt. 13:45), and even sparrows at five for two pennies (Luke 12:6). The marketplace was also where people gathered early in the morning to be hired for occasional or seasonal labor (Matt. 20:3; cf. Acts 17:5); indeed, such laborers were called *agoraioi* or “people of the marketplace.” In addition, the marketplace was the scene for the sale of slaves (Matt. 18:25; cf.

1 Tim. 1:10). On occasion, one could see in the marketplace a slave girl with a “spirit of divination” bringing in money for her owners (Acts 16:16), young flute players ready to play for a wedding or funeral (Matt. 11:16–17), or a man carrying water (Mark 14:13). Also in the marketplace and elsewhere in the city were the workshops where artisans crafted innumerable products. Paul, for example, was a leatherworker, apparently specializing in tents (Acts 18:3; cf. 1 Thess. 2:9; 1 Cor. 4:12; 2 Cor. 11:27), and scattered references identify other artisans as fullers (Mark 9:3), tanners (Acts 9:43), silversmiths (Acts 19:24), potters (Rom. 9:21), and metalworkers (2 Tim. 4:14).

Port cities were involved in shipping (Acts 21:2–3). Especially important was the Roman grain trade, which receives incidental notice in the course of Paul’s journey to Rome for trial (Acts 27:2, 6, 38; 28:11). Grain, of course, was not the only import to Rome. Captains and sailors (Rev. 18:11) brought in merchandise from places as far away as Africa, China, and India, to judge from the long list in Revelation 18:12–13: gold and silver, jewels and pearls, purple cloth, silks and fine linen, scented woods, ivory, cinnamon, incense, perfumes, wine, oil, horses, and slaves. Construction was a ubiquitous urban economic activity. At the time of Jesus, for example, renovations and enlargements of the temple in Jerusalem had been going on for forty-six years (John 2:20), and references to building are quite common (Matt. 7:24; Mark 12:10; Luke 14:28; 1 Cor. 3:10; Eph. 2:20; Heb. 3:3). Equally ubiquitous, though less

reputable, were the economic activities of various urban marginals: thieves (Matt. 24:43; Luke 12:33; 1 Thess. 5:2), prostitutes (Luke 15:30), and beggars (Mark 10:46; Luke 16:3, 20–21; 1 John 3:17).

Economic activity also characterized the temple complex and the culture it maintained. Festivals drew large numbers of pilgrims to Jerusalem, making the temple the focal point of economic life there. The temple complex itself was a site for buying and selling sacrificial animals (Mark 11:15; John 2:14; cf. Luke 2:24) and for the reception of offerings, large and small (Mark 12:41–43; Acts 21:24). When such other economic activities as collecting the temple tax (Matt. 17:24) and money changing (Mark 11:15) are included, Jesus's use of an economic metaphor when denouncing the Jerusalem temple as a "marketplace" (John 2:16) becomes understandable.

The principal locus of the ancient economy, however, was the urban household, especially the "great households" (2 Tim. 2:20). These households were large, complex, and economically central. They included not only the householder and his wife and children, but also numerous slaves—a social pattern familiar from the household codes of Ephesian 5:21–6:9 and Colossians 3:18–4:1. But these households might also contain other persons for short or even extended periods of time: rich friends and neighbors invited in for a banquet (Mark 6:21–28; Luke 14:12; 1 Cor. 11:17–34); more formal groups, or associations, provided with room and resources for religious and social meetings (Rom. 16:1–2, 23; Philem. 22; 3 John

5–8); and still others, such as teachers and workers, admitted into the household for indefinite periods (1 Cor. 9:4–5; 3 John 5–8; cf. Acts 18:3).

The large numbers of people who belonged to a great household filled a variety of economic roles. Loyal and dependable slaves had positions of responsibility as stewards (Gal. 4:2), overseeing the householder's accounts (Luke 16:1), paying the householder's occasional hired help (Matt. 20:6), or being put in charge of the other slaves (Luke 12:42–45). Other tasks assigned to slaves included being in charge of a banquet (John 2:8), preparing food and waiting on tables (Luke 17:8), tutoring the householder's children (1 Cor. 4:15), delivering messages (Luke 14:17), answering the door (Mark 13:34; Acts 12:13), or working as artisans, a role not attested in the New Testament but implicit, for example, in Paul's perception of his tent-making as slavish (1 Cor. 9:1, 19).

A wealthy householder might not need to work (Matt. 13:27–30, 52; 20:1; 21:33; 14:21), though there are scattered references to such administrative functions as inspecting a new parcel of land (Luke 14:18), deciding what to do in the wake of sabotaged fields (Matt. 13:27), dealing personally with rebellious tenants (Mark 12:9), dismissing a steward suspected of mismanagement (Luke 16:2), and deciding whether to punish a returning slave who has caused financial loss (Philem. 10–18). As masters, householders could be harsh (Matt. 18:32–34; 1 Pet. 2:18), inflicting both verbal attacks

(Luke 19:22) and physical beatings (1 Pet. 2:19–20) on their slaves.

The New Testament counsels against masters making threats toward slaves and advocates fair treatment (Col. 4:1; Eph. 6:9), but slaves are likewise admonished to obey their masters, work hard, and not steal (Col. 3:22; Eph. 6:5–7; Titus 2:9–10).

A householder's wife also had economic responsibilities. Her roles in the household are succinctly listed in 1 Timothy 5:14: to marry, bear children, and manage the household (cf. Titus 2:4–5). This third function, managing the household, may have assumed responsibility for the family's internal finances (i.e., the household budget).

Despite their roles in the household economy, the householder and his wife should be viewed as users or consumers of wealth. They typically used their considerable wealth for public display, for impressing others, and for personal enjoyment. Wealth was displayed in jewelry and fine clothing (Luke 7:25; 16:19; James 2:2) as well as at banquets with gold and silver serving dishes (2 Tim. 2:20), extravagant menus (Luke 16:19), and costly entertainment. The use of wealth for personal enjoyment is also easily documented: the hedonistic motto of one household was “eat, drink, be merry” (Luke 12:19); another householder is depicted as feasting in great magnificence every day (Luke 16:19); and the rich are generally characterized as full and sated or otherwise satisfying their many desires (Luke 6:25; 1 Thess. 5:6–8; 1 Tim. 6:9–10; James 5:5).

While moneymaking activities in the city—loans (Matt. 18:23; 25:20–

23), savings (Luke 19:23), the sale of slaves (1 Tim. 1:10)—partially supported the aristocratic household and lifestyle, the principal source of the householder’s wealth was land, and this wealth came largely from the agricultural produce of extensive and ever-expanding (Mark 12:1; Luke 14:18) properties beyond the city walls in the countryside.

Commerce in the Countryside

The word “countryside” (in Greek, *chōra*) is a technical term with a decidedly economic meaning. It refers to all agriculturally productive land that surrounded the city. Used quite frequently in the New Testament in this economic sense (Luke 12:16; John 11:55; James 5:4), it refers specifically to fields, vineyards, pastures, orchards, and even woods with their supply of nuts, berries, wood, and game. It is here in the *chōra* that the householders owned land that was worked by tenants (Mark 12:1, 9) or slaves (Luke 17:7), who became rural members of their landlord’s already sizable households. On occasion, temporary help in the form of hired laborers (from the city or countryside) was required (Luke 15:15, 17), especially during the harvest of grain (Matt. 9:37; 13:30) or the vintage (Matt. 20:7). After the harvest, a slave manager would pay the temporary laborers (Matt. 20:8) and then take his master’s portion of the crop (Matt. 21:34), including any surplus (Luke 12:16–18). These tenants and slaves, along with independent farmers (Mark 4:3; Matt. 21:28), lived in villages scattered throughout the countryside. Villages also had

carpenters (Mark 6:3), shopkeepers (Luke 9:12), innkeepers (Luke 10:35; cf. 9:12; 24:28–29), and economic marginals such as beggars (Mark 10:46).

The economic life of the countryside was varied and hence required a variety of agricultural roles, or at least a variety of agricultural tasks. Farming and herding were the basic economic roles. Farmers, of course, grew grain (Matt. 13:24–25; Mark 4:26–29), but they could also take care of a vineyard (Matt. 21:28; Mark 12:1; 1 Cor. 9:7), fig trees (Luke 13:7; James 3:12), olive trees (Rom. 11:17–18), not to mention a garden for planting a mustard tree (Matt. 13:32; Luke 13:19) or vegetables (cf. Rom. 14:2). Likewise, herders obviously tended their livestock, whether cattle (Luke 15:23), sheep (Matt. 18:12; Luke 2:8; 1 Cor. 9:7), goats (Matt. 25:33; Luke 15:29), or pigs (Mark 5:11). In the region of the Sea of Galilee, the fishing industry was especially prominent (Mark 1:16–20; Luke 5:1–11; John 21:1–3). In addition, on occasion there were other jobs to do: building granaries (Luke 12:18), putting up fencing, making wine presses, building watchtowers (Matt. 21:33), and constructing synagogues (Luke 7:5).

The agricultural tasks can be defined further in order to give a sense of the actual work done in the countryside. Farmers, for example, had much to do: plowing the field (Luke 9:62; 17:7; 1 Cor. 9:10), winnowing (Luke 3:17), burning the chaff (Matt. 3:12), and storing the grain in barns (Matt. 6:26; Luke 12:18). In addition, they might

set out vines (1 Cor. 9:7) and then cultivate, water, and prune them (Luke 13:7; 1 Cor. 3:8; John 15:2), or they might make olive grafts (Rom. 11:17–18), water the oxen (Luke 13:15), spread manure (Luke 13:8), burn pruned branches (Matt. 7:19), or chop down nonproducing trees (Luke 3:9). Similarly, herders had to watch their flocks (Luke 2:8), which included chasing after strays (Luke 15:4), digging pits to trap marauding wolves (Matt. 12:11), and separating sheep and goats at nightfall (Matt. 25:32). Fishermen could be found throwing their nets into the water (Mark 1:16), hauling in fish (Luke 5:6–7), sorting fish (Matt. 13:48), or washing and mending nets (Matt. 4:21; Mark 1:19). Women in the villages were busy too, spinning and weaving (Matt. 6:28), mending old clothes (Mark 2:21), grinding meal (Matt. 24:41; Luke 17:35), making bread (Matt. 13:33), sweeping the house (Luke 15:8), or going out to a well for water (John 4:7). On occasion, they might earn some money as mourners for one who had died (Mark 5:38).

Not only the number of tasks but many details about them make clear that the lives of farmers, herders, and fishermen were hard—a far cry from the leisure of the urban landowners. At any rate, many tasks were physically demanding, such as digging (Luke 16:3). There was also the scorching sun (Matt. 20:12; Rev. 7:16) or, in the case of shepherds and fishermen, working the whole night through (Luke 2:8; 5:5; John 21:3). What is more, these workers toiled on diets near subsistence level. At times, the land produced not abundance but thorns (Heb. 6:8; cf. Matt. 7:16) and fishing nets

came up empty (Luke 5:5; John 21:3). Consequently, even sparrows could become a meal (Matt. 10:29), and some might be tempted to eat the pods fed to swine (Luke 15:15–16). Not surprisingly, famine was always a specter (Luke 15:14; Acts 11:28; Rev. 6:8). Thus a prayer for “daily bread” was literally appropriate (Matt. 6:11; Luke 11:3).

Agricultural workers, however, had more to face than hard work, long hours, and little food. Herders had to contend with wolves and brigands (Matt. 7:15; John 10:8, 10), fishermen with squalls (Mark 4:37), and everyone with fraudulent tax collectors and their brutal soldiers (Luke 3:11–14; 19:8). In addition, a householder might withhold the wages of those who had harvested his crops (James 5:4), and when those from the countryside went to the city they could be compelled to do some task (Mark 15:21; cf. Matt. 5:41) or even be misidentified as a brigand (cf. Luke 22:52) and summarily executed (Luke 23:21). Thus the overall impression is one of most people toiling incessantly in the countryside in order that a few householders and their families in the city might live in ease and extravagance.

Commerce in the Wilderness

The third of the general categories for organizing the New Testament evidence regarding the ancient economic conditions is the wilderness. If the countryside is the productive land that immediately surrounds and supplies the city, then the wilderness is the more

distant and nonproductive land that extends beyond the countryside in all directions. As nonproductive land, the wilderness could consist of desert, such as the barren land in the Jordan Valley near the Dead Sea (Mark 1:4; cf. John 11:54) or the Arabian Desert (1 Cor. 10:1–5). Yet the term “wilderness” does not usually imply literal desert; it simply refers to any nonproductive area, such as very hilly, mountainous, or otherwise isolated land (Matt. 15:33; 2 Cor. 11:26). It can even refer to formerly productive and populated areas (Matt. 12:25; Luke 21:20).

Still, to say that wilderness is economically unproductive land is not to deny its economic role. A wilderness might be crossed by roads on which traders and other travelers would move (Luke 10:30–33). Such travelers were exposed to attack by brigands who seem to have operated at will in these distant and isolated areas (Luke 10:30; 2 Cor. 11:26). Indeed, from the safety of their wilderness hideouts, brigands might make forays into the countryside to attack, say, the flocks of herders (John 10:1) and, if numerous and rapacious enough, they could pose a political threat (Acts 5:36–37; 21:38). Despite this apparent inhospitable character, the wilderness is sometimes regarded as a place for repentance and renewal (Mark 1:2–6) or retreat (Mark 1:35).

Summary and Conclusion

In New Testament times, there was some considerable commercialization, as reflected in the description of Rome and its

merchants presented in Revelation 18. Still, the economy remained fundamentally tied to agriculture. Other than the activities of free artisans and shopkeepers in the cities (and rural villages) and of brigand gangs in the wilderness, the vast majority of people lived as farmers, herders, and fishermen in the countryside surrounding a city and worked on land that was usually owned by the urban aristocracy who lived—and lived well—off its surplus. The two groups—the producers of wealth and the consumers of it—were related socially through the institution of the household and surrounded geographically by economically marginal hills, mountains, and deserts (the wilderness).

This material has been adapted from an article by Ronald F. Hock and Mark Allan Powell in the *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 217–20.

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2.9

The “Jesus Boat”: A Glimpse into the World of First-Century Fishermen

In 1986 a first-century CE fishing boat was found submerged in the Sea of Galilee. Dubbed the “Jesus boat,” the craft has attracted the attention of scholars and tourists alike. It now has its own website (<https://www.jesusboat.com/story-of-the-Jesus-Boat>), museum, and gift shop.

New Testament scholars do not suppose that this is a boat actually used by Jesus and his disciples, but they are interested in the artifact nevertheless. The boat, eight by twenty-six feet, was rather poorly crafted; it was constructed from varied materials and had undergone numerous repairs. Thus it may represent a vessel typical of what would have been used by ordinary fishermen of the day.

The boat has a more narrow draft than anyone would have supposed and for this reason it would have sat much lower in the water than most would consider advisable. With some reflection, scholars have concluded that the lack of depth was intentional (and probably typical), because it would facilitate the hauling of nets filled with fish into the vessel.

The extremely low draught would, however, have one serious drawback: the boat could be easily swamped by waves and may have been vulnerable to sinking in a storm. Bible readers are

immediately reminded of Mark 4:37, “A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped.” It seems likely that the boats Jesus and his disciples used were at least similar to this one.

For more, see Jonathan L. Reed, *The HarperCollins Visual Guide to the New Testament: What Archaeology Reveals about the First Christians* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 68–69.

2.10

Two Jewish Writers: Philo and Josephus

PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA (20 BCE–50 CE). Philo was a contemporary of Jesus, though he shows no knowledge of having heard of Jesus. He lived in Alexandria (in northern Egypt) and provides us with a fairly extreme example of Hellenistic Judaism. His writings try to reconcile the Hebrew Scriptures with Greek philosophy (especially Platonism and Stoicism). He wants to show Jews that many Hellenistic ideas are actually taught (often allegorically) in their Scriptures, and he wants to show others that the Jewish religion is an intellectually respectable and profound faith. His writings sometimes reveal things about the Jewish and Roman worlds that might otherwise be unknown to us (e.g., a section of one book describes the beliefs and practices of the Essenes).

JOSEPHUS (37–100 CE). Josephus was a Jewish aristocrat born into a priestly family just one generation after Jesus. He became an important historian, concentrating most of his writings on matters pertaining to the Jewish people. During the war with Rome, he led the Jewish forces in Galilee, but after he was captured he went over to the Roman side and later became a court historian in Rome. His book *Jewish Antiquities* retells much of Jewish history for a Roman audience. *The Jewish War* picks up that story around the beginning of the second century BCE and continues through the siege in

Masada that ended the recent conflict. The writings of Josephus contain numerous stories about the New Testament era as viewed from a Hellenistic Jewish perspective, including details about Pontius Pilate and the various Herodian rulers, and even a few references to John the Baptist and Jesus.

2.11

Caiaphas

Joseph Caiaphas (pronounced kay´uh-fuhs) was the son-in-law and eventual successor of the Jewish high priest Annas. He is thought to have assumed this position in 18 CE under the Roman governor Valerius Gratus and to have held it until he was deposed in around 36 or 37 by Vitellius, Pontius Pilate’s successor. He would, accordingly, appear to have been the high priest at the time of the trial of Jesus (Matt. 26:3, 57; John 18:13, 24), although Luke 3:2 and Acts 4:6 suggest a more complicated scenario.

John’s Gospel ascribes to Caiaphas the judgment regarding Jesus that it would be “better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed” (11:50); the author of John’s Gospel regards this judgment as an ironic prophecy, by which the high priest (unwittingly) declared that Jesus’s death would be for the nation (and for all children of God; cf. 11:51–52).

The discovery of a first-century-CE family tomb in the Peace Forest outside Jerusalem in 1990 yielded a dozen stone ossuaries containing the remains of sixty-three individuals. The most elaborately decorated of the ossuaries is inscribed twice with the name “Yehoseph bar Kayafa” (Aramaic for “Joseph son of Caiaphas”). It contained the bones of four children, an adult woman,

and a man of about sixty. Many scholars believe that the bones of the adult male are in fact those of the high priest Caiaphas.

2.12

The Shema (Box 2.2)

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.”

In Jesus’s day, as in our own, the Shema was the central prayer of Judaism, recited daily. It comes from Deuteronomy 6:4, though later versions would add a liturgical refrain and append verses from Deuteronomy 6:5–9; 11:13–21; Numbers 15:37–41. *Shema* is the Hebrew word for “Hear!”

2.13

Tales of Heroism and Martyrdom from the Time of Antiochus IV Epiphanes

The years after the return of the Jews from exile but before the Roman conquest of Palestine included a time of unprecedented horror. The Seleucid ruler Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175–164 BCE), sought to exterminate the Jewish religion by inflicting horrible atrocities on anyone who professed or practiced the faith:

The books of the law that they found they tore to pieces and burned with fire. Anyone found possessing the book of the covenant, or anyone who adhered to the law, was condemned to death by decree of the king. According to the decree, they put to death the women who had their children circumcised, and their families and those who circumcised them; and they hung the infants from their mothers' necks. (1 Macc. 1:54–58, 60–61)

The deuterocanonical books of 1 and 2 Maccabees (part of what Protestant Christians call “the Apocrypha”) relate numerous tales of heroism and martyrdom during this time.

Martyrdom of Eleazar

The martyrdom of Eleazar, an aged scribe, is told with serenity and dignity: he suffers a noble death that would have been deemed heroic by the Hellenists responsible for the persecution.

Eleazar, one of the scribes in high position, a man now advanced in age and of noble presence, was being forced to open his mouth to eat swine's flesh. But he, welcoming death with honor rather than life with pollution, went up to the rack of his own accord, spitting out the flesh, as all ought to go who have the courage to refuse things that it is not right to taste, even for the natural love of life.

Those who were in charge of that unlawful sacrifice took the man aside because of their long acquaintance with him, and privately urged him to bring meat of his own providing, proper for him to use, and to pretend that he was eating the flesh of the sacrificial meal that had been commanded by the king, so that by doing this he might be saved from death, and be treated kindly on account of his old friendship with them. But making a high resolve, worthy of his years and the dignity of his old age and the gray hairs that he had reached with distinction and his excellent life even from childhood, and moreover according to the holy God-given law, he declared himself quickly, telling them to send him to Hades.

"Such pretense is not worthy of our time of life," he said, "for many of the young might suppose that Eleazar in his ninetieth year had gone over to an alien religion, and through my pretense, for the sake of living a brief moment longer, they would be led astray because of me, while I defile and disgrace my old age. Even if for the present I would avoid the punishment of mortals, yet whether I live or die I will not escape the hands of the Almighty. Therefore, by bravely giving up my life now, I will

show myself worthy of my old age and leave to the young a noble example of how to die a good death willingly and nobly for the revered and holy laws.”

When he had said this, he went at once to the rack. Those who a little before had acted toward him with goodwill now changed to ill will, because the words he had uttered were in their opinion sheer madness. When he was about to die under the blows, he groaned aloud and said: “It is clear to the Lord in his holy knowledge that, though I might have been saved from death, I am enduring terrible sufferings in my body under this beating, but in my soul I am glad to suffer these things because I fear him.”

So in this way he died, leaving in his death an example of nobility and a memorial of courage, not only to the young but to the great body of his nation. (2 Macc. 6:18–31)

Martyrdom of Seven Brothers and Their Mother

The account of these martyrdoms is gruesome and disturbing, intended to reveal both the extreme cruelty of the Seleucid holocaust and the unprecedented courage with which Jewish victims remained faithful to their God.

It happened also that seven brothers and their mother were arrested and were being compelled by the king, under torture with whips and thongs, to partake of unlawful swine’s flesh. One of them, acting as their spokesman, said, “What do you intend to ask and learn from us? For we are ready to die rather than transgress the laws of our ancestors.”

The king fell into a rage, and gave orders to have pans and caldrons heated. These were heated immediately, and he commanded that the tongue of their spokesman be cut out and that they scalp him and cut off his hands and feet, while the rest of the brothers and the mother looked on. When he was utterly helpless, the king ordered them to take him to the fire, still breathing, and to fry him in a pan. The smoke from the pan spread widely, but the brothers and their mother encouraged one another to die nobly, saying, "The Lord God is watching over us and in truth has compassion on us, as Moses declared in his song that bore witness against the people to their faces, when he said, 'And he will have compassion on his servants.'"

After the first brother had died in this way, they brought forward the second for their sport. They tore off the skin of his head with the hair, and asked him, "Will you eat rather than have your body punished limb by limb?" He replied in the language of his ancestors and said to them, "No." Therefore he in turn underwent tortures as the first brother had done. And when he was at his last breath, he said, "You accursed wretch, you dismiss us from this present life, but the King of the universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life, because we have died for his laws."

After him, the third was the victim of their sport. When it was demanded, he quickly put out his tongue and courageously stretched forth his hands, and said nobly, "I got these from Heaven, and because of his laws I disdain them, and from him I hope to get them back again." As a result the king himself and

those with him were astonished at the young man's spirit, for he regarded his sufferings as nothing.

After he too had died, they maltreated and tortured the fourth in the same way. When he was near death, he said, "One cannot but choose to die at the hands of mortals and to cherish the hope God gives of being raised again by him. But for you there will be no resurrection to life!"

Next they brought forward the fifth and maltreated him. But he looked at the king, and said, "Because you have authority among mortals, though you also are mortal, you do what you please. But do not think that God has forsaken our people. Keep on, and see how his mighty power will torture you and your descendants!"

After him they brought forward the sixth. And when he was about to die, he said, "Do not deceive yourself in vain. For we are suffering these things on our own account, because of our sins against our own God. Therefore astounding things have happened. But do not think that you will go unpunished for having tried to fight against God!"

The mother was especially admirable and worthy of honorable memory. Although she saw her seven sons perish within a single day, she bore it with good courage because of her hope in the Lord. She encouraged each of them in the language of their ancestors. Filled with a noble spirit, she reinforced her woman's reasoning with a man's courage, and said to them, "I do not know how you came into being in my womb. It was not I who gave you life and breath, nor I who set in order the elements

within each of you. Therefore the Creator of the world, who shaped the beginning of humankind and devised the origin of all things, will in his mercy give life and breath back to you again, since you now forget yourselves for the sake of his laws.”

Antiochus felt that he was being treated with contempt, and he was suspicious of her reproachful tone. The youngest brother being still alive, Antiochus not only appealed to him in words, but promised with oaths that he would make him rich and enviable if he would turn from the ways of his ancestors, and that he would take him for his Friend and entrust him with public affairs. Since the young man would not listen to him at all, the king called the mother to him and urged her to advise the youth to save himself. After much urging on his part, she undertook to persuade her son. But, leaning close to him, she spoke in their native language as follows, deriding the cruel tyrant: “My son, have pity on me. I carried you nine months in my womb, and nursed you for three years, and have reared you and brought you up to this point in your life, and have taken care of you. I beg you, my child, to look at the heaven and the earth and see everything that is in them, and recognize that God did not make them out of things that existed. And in the same way the human race came into being. Do not fear this butcher, but prove worthy of your brothers. Accept death, so that in God’s mercy I may get you back again along with your brothers.”

While she was still speaking, the young man said, “What are you waiting for? I will not obey the king’s command, but I obey the command of the law that was given to our ancestors through

Moses. But you, who have contrived all sorts of evil against the Hebrews, will certainly not escape the hands of God. For we are suffering because of our own sins. And if our living Lord is angry for a little while, to rebuke and discipline us, he will again be reconciled with his own servants. But you, unholy wretch, you most defiled of all mortals, do not be elated in vain and puffed up by uncertain hopes, when you raise your hand against the children of heaven. You have not yet escaped the judgment of the almighty, all-seeing God. For our brothers after enduring a brief suffering have drunk of ever-flowing life, under God's covenant; but you, by the judgment of God, will receive just punishment for your arrogance. I, like my brothers, give up body and life for the laws of our ancestors, appealing to God to show mercy soon to our nation and by trials and plagues to make you confess that he alone is God, and through me and my brothers to bring to an end the wrath of the Almighty that has justly fallen on our whole nation."

The king fell into a rage, and handled him worse than the others, being exasperated at his scorn. So he died in his integrity, putting his whole trust in the Lord.

Last of all, the mother died, after her sons. (2 Macc. 7:1–41)

2.14

Quotation from the Mishnah (Box 2.4)

By three things the world is sustained:

by the law (Torah),

by the temple-service,

and by deeds of loving-kindness.

—Mishnah, *Avot* 1:2

Jacob Neusner, *The Mishnah: A New Translation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

2.15

Christians and the Apocrypha

The Apocrypha consists of several books that are included in the Septuagint but are absent from the Hebrew Bible:

Additions to Daniel¹

Additions to Esther

Baruch

1 Esdras

Judith

Letter of Jeremiah

1 Maccabees

2 Maccabees

3 Maccabees

4 Maccabees

Prayer of Manasseh

Psalms 151

Sirach (Ecclesiasticus)

Tobit

Wisdom of Solomon

In the New Testament, the Apocrypha is never cited as Scripture, but Paul and other authors appear to have read some of these books and to regard their teaching favorably:

Romans 1:20–29	recalls	Wisdom 13:5–8; 14:24–27
Romans 9:20–23	recalls	Wisdom 12:12, 20; 15:7
2 Corinthians 5:1–4	recalls	Wisdom 9:15
James 1:19	recalls	Sirach 5:11
James 1:13	recalls	Sirach 15:11–12

In modern Christianity there is a spectrum of opinion regarding the Apocrypha.

Greek Orthodox churches regard all the books listed above as part of their Old Testament canon of Scripture.

Roman Catholic churches follow a decision made at the Council of Trent (1546) to regard most of these books (all but 1 Esdras, Prayer of Manasseh, Psalm 151, 3 Maccabees, and 4 Maccabees) as Scripture. They resist the term “apocrypha” and prefer to call the books “deuterocanonical” (which means “secondary canon” or “added to the canon later”). The books are read and used in church on a status almost equivalent to other writings of the Old Testament, with the caveat that no teaching or doctrine is to be established from these writings alone.

Anglicans and Episcopalians do not usually refer to the books of the Apocrypha as Scripture, but they do regard them as ancient sacred writings that may be used in liturgy and as texts for preaching in church.

Lutherans, Methodists, Presbyterians, and some other Protestant denominations commend the books of the Apocrypha for reading and regard them as works of historical and spiritual interest, but they do not regard them as Scripture and (unlike the Anglicans) have not traditionally authorized their use as sacred texts in worship.

Other Protestants regard the Apocrypha with attitudes ranging from respect to disdain. The Puritans who came to America viewed the Apocrypha with suspicion and objected to the books being included in printed Bibles. That attitude has taken hold among many American denominations.

1. Sometimes these are listed separately as Prayer of Azariah and Song of Three Jews; Susanna; Bel and the Dragon.

2.16

After the New Testament: Writings of Early Christianity

These writings shed light on the nature of Christianity just after the New Testament era:

THE DIDACHE (ca. 100 CE). The author of this writing is unknown, but it presents a summary of Christian teaching from a time period shortly after the principal writings of the New Testament. It includes instruction on basic morality, how to conduct baptisms, which days should be set aside for fasting, how to pray, how to celebrate the Eucharist, how to show hospitality to missionaries, how to distinguish true prophets from false ones, and how to appoint leaders within the community. Some early Christians (Clement of Alexandria and Origen) treated it as Scripture.

CLEMENT OF ROME (d. ca. 100 CE). Clement was bishop of Rome for the last ten to fifteen years of his life, during the time of the emperor Domitian. Traditionally, he is identified as the author of a letter to the church in Corinth (called 1 Clement) that appears to have been written around 96 CE, which may make it earlier than some New Testament books. The letter was read as Scripture in some parts of the early church, and it continues to be valued by

scholars as an authentic witness to Christian thought at the end of the first century.

IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH (ca. 35–110 CE). Ignatius became the bishop of the church in Antioch, where both Paul and Peter had been active a generation earlier, and where the Gospel of Matthew is thought to have been written just twenty to thirty years prior to Ignatius's own works. Ignatius was arrested and taken to Rome, where he was martyred in the arena (apparently killed by lions). On the way to his death, he wrote seven letters to various churches; they are revealing of Christian thought and life in the early second century.

EUSEBIUS (ca. 260–340 CE). Eusebius served as bishop of Caesarea in the days after the conversion of the Roman emperor Constantine. He wrote *Ecclesiastical History*, the first definitive history of the Christian church up to that point. It records the current traditions of the church regarding the lives of the apostles and other early leaders, along with stories of Roman persecutions of the church. Eusebius does not always distinguish between reliable tradition and legendary material, but he does preserve lengthy quotations from earlier authors whose works would otherwise be lost to us.

3.0

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3.4

The Art of Reading

Literacy was not uncommon in New Testament times, though there were often “levels of literacy”: many people could read a simple or familiar text, especially if they had time to figure it out and possessed the patience to do so. Still, it was an art to be able to read texts fluently, so there were professional lectors who would be employed for such a task.

Some reasons why reading was an art:

1. Though not uncommon, basic literacy was nowhere near as widespread as today; many people probably never learned to read anything at all.
2. Texts were not printed clearly on paper but were written by hand on papyri, requiring the lector to contend with various handwriting styles complicated by the uneven quality of the writing materials that had been employed.
3. The writing style of the day did not include features that we take for granted, such as
 - punctuation
 - both lower-case and capital letters
 - spaces between words

The style was simply to write in a continuous stream of capital letters, without any breaks between words or sentences—not even at the end of a line. If we wrote this way, the first five verse of John’s Gospel would look like this:

INTHEBEGINNI

NGWASTHEWORD

ANDTHEWORDWA

SWITHGODANDT

HEWORDWASGOD

HEWASINTHEBE

GINNINGWITHG

ODALLTHINGSC

AMEINTOBEING

THROUGHHIMAN

DWITHOUTHIMN

OTONETHINGCA

MEINTOBEINGW

HATHASCOMEIN

TOBEINGINHIM

WASLIFEANDTH

ELIFEWASTHEL

IGHTOFALLPEO

PLETHELIGHTS

173

HINESINTHEDA

RKNESSANDTHE

Difficult, but not impossible—especially if you already know what it says!

Reading Scripture in a synagogue (as Jesus does in Luke 4:16–19) was relatively easy because the lectors knew the scriptural texts almost by heart. And, of course, most lectors could practice reading these standard or familiar texts in advance.

To be handed a text and read it at sight would be another matter. So in Petronius's *Satyricon* a young man is considered very impressive because “he can do division and read books at sight” (75).

The New Testament Gospels were probably intended to be read aloud in settings where the early Christians would gather for fellowship and worship. If a congregation possessed a coveted copy of a Gospel, lectors might become as familiar with it as they were with the Scriptures or other “published texts.”

The New Testament letters were probably another matter.

Sometimes the content of these letters was intended for an entire congregation (1 Thess. 5:27) and, apparently, letters were sometimes passed around from one church to another (Col. 4:16). If a newly received letter was to be read smoothly to a gathered congregation, the services of a gifted lector would be invaluable.

3.5

Justin Martyr on Christian Worship in the Second Century (Box 3.1)

In chapter 67 of his *First Apology*, the Christian theologian Justin Martyr (110–65) provides us with our earliest account of Christian worship outside the New Testament itself:

On the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray, and . . . when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying Amen; and there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that over which thanks have been given, and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons. And they who are well to do, and willing, give what each thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the president, who succors the orphans and widows and those who, through sickness or any other cause, are in want, and those who are in bonds and the strangers sojourning among us, and in a word takes care of all who are in need. But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and

matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Savior on the
same day rose from the dead.

Ante-Nicene Fathers, ed. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, 10 vols. (1885–96; repr.,
Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986–89), 1:186.

3.6

New Testament Canon: The Early Lists

By the end of the second century, lists began to appear specifying which Christian writings were to be considered Scripture by churches in line with the apostolic tradition (i.e., in line with what Jesus, his disciples, and the apostle Paul had taught). In most cases, these lists were more descriptive than prescriptive: they did not attempt to regulate which writings should be read as Scripture, but rather shared with other Christians which books were accepted as Scripture in some particular region or congregation.

The essential data from some of these early canon lists is given below, followed by a summary.

The Muratorian Fragment (ca. 170–200)

An unknown author wrote the Muratorian Fragment, which lists books that are to be regarded as Scripture.

- Books not included: Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 3 John
- A book not in our current New Testament that is included: *Apocalypse of Peter* (with note: “some of us are not willing that it be read in church”)

- Books that are approved but not as Scripture: Shepherd of Hermas (written too recently; ought to be read, but not “publicly to the people in church”)
- Books to be rejected: two spurious forgeries attributed to Paul, Letter to the Laodiceans and Letter to the Alexandrians (unknown to us)

Origen of Alexandria (ca. 215–250)

Origen, an early theologian, does not provide a list but does discuss which books are disputed.

- 2 Peter: “Peter left behind one letter that is acknowledged, and possibly a second, but it is disputed”
- 2 John and 3 John: “not everyone agrees that they are genuine”
- Hebrews: probably not written by Paul, but acceptable anyway because “the thoughts of the epistle are marvelous and in no way inferior to the acknowledged writings of the apostle”

Eusebius of Caesarea (ca. 311)

The early church historian Eusebius of Caesarea reports which books were considered Scripture in his day.

- James, Jude, 2 Peter, 2 John, 3 John: “disputed books which are nonetheless known by many”

- Revelation: among both the “acknowledged books” and the noncanonical books, noting that it is a “book that some reject but others judge to belong”
- Listed as noncanonical: *Acts of Paul*, Shepherd of Hermas, *Apocalypse of Peter*, *Didache*, *Epistle of Barnabas*, and Gospel to the Hebrews (which Eusebius says is considered noncanonical only by “some people” and is “particularly celebrated” by others)

Cyril of Jerusalem (ca. 350)

Cyril of Jerusalem, a prominent Eastern theologian, wrote a catechism in which he discusses canon. He lists all books of our current New Testament except Revelation, and says that no other books should be read in the churches or even privately (as his readers might have heard was acceptable). He specifically lambastes the Gospel of Thomas as a work that “having been camouflaged by the sweetness of its title derived from an apostle corrupts the souls of the simpler ones.”

Mommsen Catalogue (aka Cheltenham List) (ca. 359)

An unknown author from North Africa wrote the Mommsen Catalogue. The list indicates that the New Testament contains twenty-four books, as symbolized by the twenty-four elders in the book of Revelation (see Rev. 4:4). It doesn't include Hebrews, James, or Jude, and seems to indicate that only one letter of John

and only one letter of Peter are canonical (but that would throw off the count, which is supposed to be twenty-four).

Athanasius of Alexandria (367)

Athanasius, a prominent bishop, wrote a letter listing what he regarded as “the canon” of Christian Scripture. He lists all twenty-seven books of the New Testament and books that are not to be included in the canon—the *Didache* and Shepherd of Hermas—but that “have nonetheless been designated by the fathers as books to be read.” He also says that “there should be no mention at all of apocryphal books created by heretics, who write them whenever they want but try to bestow favor on them by assigning them dates, that by setting them forth as ancient they can be, on false grounds, used to deceive the simple minded”

Amphilochius of Iconium (ca. 375–394)

Amphilochius of Iconium, a Christian poet, composed a poem to teach the books of the canon in iambic verse. He indicates that some say Hebrews is spurious, but that they are wrong to say this, for the grace that it imparts is genuine. He lists 2 Peter, 2 John, 3 John, and Jude as books that “some receive” but that should not be received, and says of Revelation that “some approve, but most say it is spurious.”

Third Synod of Carthage (393)

This regional meeting of churches was not a churchwide council but had significant representation. It ratified the list of Athanasius (above), declaring the twenty-seven books of our current New Testament to be the canon of Christian Scripture

Summary of Data from the Early Canon Lists

Looking at these lists, we can group the New Testament books and other early Christian writings into four basic categories.

Universally Accepted Canonical Writings

Twenty of the New Testament's twenty-seven books appear to have been accepted as canonical Scripture by virtually all churches that remained within the apostolic tradition. They are the four Gospels, the book of Acts, all thirteen of Paul's letters, 1 Peter, and 1 John. All of these books are included as accepted writings in every list known to us (with one exception: 1 Peter is not listed in the Muratorian Fragment).

Sometimes Disputed Canonical Writings

Seven of the New Testament's twenty-seven books had a more difficult time finding universal acceptance among Christian churches. They are Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 John, 3 John, Jude, and Revelation. We have no indication that these books were ever rejected or denounced, but in many cases churches seem to have been reluctant to grant them the status of Scripture.

Commended Noncanonical Writings

A few books that are not found in our New Testament turn up on the canon lists as works that are “known to many” and “recommended for Christian reading” even though they are not to be read publicly in the church (i.e., treated as Scripture or used as texts for teaching and preaching). Examples include the *Didache*, the Shepherd of Hermas, the *Apocalypse of Peter*, and the *Letter of Barnabas*. In a few cases, we find one or more of these books actually included in a list of Christian Scriptures (or, indeed, contained in an early manuscript of the New Testament). Most of the time, however, a distinction is made between “canonical writings” and “commendable-but-not-canonical writings.”

Rejected Noncanonical Writings

A number of books not found in our New Testament are listed as works to be avoided. These are books that were recognized as forgeries, having been written in the name of an apostle or associate of Jesus in order to claim support for gnostic teachings or other novel philosophies that had no connection with the apostolic tradition.

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Appendix IV.

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3.7

From Jesus to Us: Six Stages in the Transmission of the Gospel Tradition (Box 3.2)

Stage One: Historical Jesus

Jesus says and does things that are considered remarkable.

Stage Two: Early Tradition

Oral	and/or	Written
People remember what Jesus said and did and share these memories with others.		People write down brief accounts of things that Jesus said and did.

Stage Three: Composition of the Gospels

The Gospel writers compile their books, drawing on both oral tradition and early written sources to form narratives of Jesus's life and work.

Stage Four: Preservation of Manuscripts

People make copies of the Gospel narratives and distribute them.

Stage Five: Translation

Scholars translate copies of the Gospel narratives into other languages, including, eventually, our own.

Stage Six: Reception

In modern editions of the Gospels we hear or read about what Jesus said and did.

3.8

Tradition and Framework: Composition of the Gospels and Acts

Stages of Transmission

Stage One: Life setting of Jesus

Stage Two: Period of oral tradition and early written sources

Stage Three: Work of the Evangelists (authors of the Gospels)

Many scholars think the author of Luke refers to the three stages listed above in the opening sentences of his Gospel:

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were *eyewitnesses* [stage one] and *ministers of the word* have delivered them to us [stage two], it seemed good to *me* also [stage three], having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus. (Luke 1:1–3 ESV, italics added)

Basic Assumptions of New Testament Scholarship

- The Gospel tradition was transmitted through stages like those described above.
- Changes in the tradition may have occurred throughout this process of transmission.

- All that we have is the written texts of the completed Gospels and Acts, which are the cumulative products of this process.

Goal of Source Criticism and Form Criticism

The goal of source criticism and form criticism has been to understand the second stage in the transmission of the Gospel tradition so that we might also better understand the first and third stages.

Source criticism seeks to establish which portions of the Gospels and Acts derive from early written sources and, if possible, to reconstruct these early sources. Source critics classify material according to various strands of tradition (Q, M, L, etc.) and evaluate the material in each strand according to its likely origin.

Form criticism seeks to understand how traditions were preserved and handed down orally in the early church. Form critics distinguish between independent units of tradition and attempt to identify the *Sitz im Leben* (setting in life) in which these units of tradition were preserved (catechesis, liturgy, etc.).

Both source criticism and form criticism distinguish between tradition and framework. Material that is thought to derive from the period of oral tradition or from early written sources (i.e., material from stage two) is ascribed to tradition. Material that has been added by the evangelists themselves is described as framework.

Goals of Historical Jesus Studies and Redaction Criticism

Source criticism and form criticism provide the basis for two other fields of research: historical Jesus studies and redaction criticism.

Historical Jesus Studies seeks to reconstruct as accurately as possible the actual words and deeds of Jesus and his earliest followers. Historical Jesus scholars try to determine which material in the Gospels and Acts meets generally accepted criteria for historical reliability. Historical Jesus scholars focus on stage one of the Gospel transmission and are most interested in the material that source critics and form critics classify as tradition.

Redaction criticism seeks to understand the distinctive theology and concerns of the Gospel authors. Redaction critics are primarily interested in the way the authors of these books edited traditional materials and worked them into their final compositions. Redaction critics focus on stage three of the Gospel transmission and are most interested in the material that source critics and form critics classify as framework.

3.9

Text Criticism: Determining the Original Reading of the Text

External Evidence

Text critics try to determine which manuscripts are likely to be the most reliable. Manuscripts must be “weighed and not counted.”

Antiquity

More ancient manuscripts are generally preferred to less ancient ones; the following broad categories may be considered in order of decreasing significance.

1. Papyri: oldest and best (usually before the fourth century); usually fragmentary or incomplete manuscripts. Papyri manuscripts are written on sheets of papyrus.
2. Uncials: next best (usually from fourth century to ninth century); most of our oldest complete manuscripts. Uncial manuscripts are written in all capital letters.
3. Minuscules: least ancient (usually later than the ninth century). Minuscule manuscripts are written with both capital and lowercase letters. The majority of our manuscripts are minuscules, but these are not valued as highly as uncials or papyri.

Text Type

Certain families of manuscripts (produced in particular geographical areas and, perhaps, under more controlled conditions) generally prove more reliable than other families.

- Alexandrian: usually regarded as most reliable; resists grammatical or stylistic polishing or theologically motivated corrections; includes Sinaiticus [á] and Vaticanus [B], two fourth-century uncial manuscripts
- Western: displays certain oddities (harmonizes one book to agree with another; adds explanatory notes, especially in Acts; paraphrases or omits passages) but otherwise seems reliable; includes Bezae [D] and Washingtonianus [W], two fifth-century uncial manuscripts
- Byzantine: contains many more errors than the other text types and generally is regarded as the least reliable; often tries to resolve problematic readings (e.g., by harmonizing disparate accounts); includes most minuscules (and therefore the majority of manuscripts); specifically, the handful of minuscule manuscripts used for translation of the KJV were Byzantine type

Internal Evidence

Text critics try to consider variant readings logically to determine if there are intrinsic reasons to suggest that the reading found in one

manuscript is more likely to be original than the reading found in another manuscript.

What Would the Author Be More Likely to Have Written?

- Is one reading more consistent with the style and vocabulary of the author?
- Is one reading more consistent with the theology of the author?
- Does one reading cohere better with the immediate context in which the passage is found?

What Would a Scribe Be More Likely to Have Altered?

Confronted with two different readings, text critics examine each reading in turn and ask, “If this reading was the original, what would have motivated or caused the other reading to come into existence?” Sometimes, it seems more logical for the alteration to have been made in one direction than the other. Two general principles are often cited (though there are certainly exceptions to both):

The Shorter Reading Is to Be Preferred

Scribes did not want to leave anything out. When they were uncertain whether or not something belonged in the text, they were encouraged to err on the side of inclusion, so that nothing that might possibly belong in Scripture would be lost. A scribe might read an explanatory note written in the margin of a manuscript and copy it into the text of the manuscript that he was producing. A scribe confronted with two different possible readings of a verse might

include both rather than choose between them. Thus, except in obvious cases where someone accidentally skipped a line or section, the more reliable reading is often the shorter reading; the longer variant is regarded as having added something to the text rather than the shorter variant being regarded as having omitted something.

The More Difficult Reading Is to Be Preferred

Scribes had no motivation to create readings that would cause problems for the church, but they sometimes were motivated (consciously or subconsciously) to create readings that would resolve problems. They tended to correct what appeared to be grammatical errors or to substitute more common vocabulary words for obscure ones. They tended to harmonize accounts that appeared to be contradictory—for example, making Jesus say the same thing in one Gospel as he does in another Gospel. They sometimes tended to reword a text that was phrased in a way that had become theologically objectionable. Thus the more reliable reading is often the more difficult one; the easier variant is regarded as an alteration of a potentially problematic text rather than the difficult variant being regarded as an alteration of a nonproblematic one.

3.10

Source Criticism of the Gospels and Acts

Presuppositions of Source Criticism

- A significant period of time (thirty to sixty years) elapsed between the occurrence of the events reported in the Gospels and Acts and the writing of these books.
- Although this period was primarily a time of oral transmission, some materials probably were put into writing before the Gospels and Acts were produced.
- Some of these materials probably were collected and circulated or preserved by communities, including those in which the Gospels and Acts were later produced.
- These early written materials were edited by the evangelists, who used them as sources when they composed the Gospels and Acts.

What Source Critics Do

Source critics identify places in the Gospels and Acts where an evangelist may be drawing on material that was already in writing. They do this through external and internal analysis.

External Analysis

The clearest identifications of source material usually come through the study of parallel passages. When the same material is found in

more than one writing, scholars may decide that one of these writings was the source for the other(s) or that some other document was the common source for all the parallel passages known to us.

Internal Analysis

Editorial seams such as abrupt shifts or awkward connections may indicate a transition to source material. Peculiarities of style or content are also indications that source material is being used. Based on such analysis, source critics propose lists of materials that each author might have used when composing his book.

Results of Source Criticism: Some Common Proposals

Possible Sources for Matthew's Gospel

- the Gospel of Mark
- a collection of the sayings of Jesus, called "Q"
- a variety of other sources, collectively called "M"

According to the Farrer Theory, Matthew used Mark as a source, but not Q; according to the Two-Gospel Hypothesis, Matthew did not use Mark or Q.

Possible Sources for Mark's Gospel

- a collection of controversy stories, including those found now in Mark 2:1–3:6
- a collection or, possibly, two collections of miracle stories, including many of those now found in chapters 4–8

- an apocalyptic tract containing much of what is now in chapter 13
- an early version of the passion narrative (the story of Jesus's death and resurrection)

According to the Two-Gospel Hypothesis, Mark used Matthew and Luke as sources.

Possible Sources for Luke's Gospel

- the Gospel of Mark
- a collection of the sayings of Jesus, called "Q"
- a variety of other sources, collectively called "L"

According to the Farrer Theory, Luke used Mark and Matthew as a source, but not Q; according to the Two-Gospel Hypothesis, Luke used Matthew as a source, but not Mark or Q.

Possible Sources for John's Gospel

- a "Signs Gospel" that recorded seven or eight miracle stories (John 2:1–12; 4:46–54; 5:1–9; 6:1–13; 9:1–7; 11:1–44; 21:1–6; perhaps 6:15–25) and may have included an account of the passion and resurrection
- a collection of remembrances of one called the "beloved disciple," dealing mostly with the last week of Jesus's life
- a body of material underlying the great discourses of Jesus, possibly sermons by the beloved disciple or another prominent member of the community

Possible Sources for the Book of Acts

- an Aramaic document describing the life of the early church in Jerusalem, used for Acts 1–12
- a collection of traditions from the church in Antioch, used for stories concerning Stephen and Barnabas (6:1–8:3; 11:19–30; 12:25–25:35)
- a travel diary, used for portions of the book recounting the journeys of Paul

Separating Tradition from Framework

Source critics sometimes attempt to reconstruct what the early written sources may have looked like prior to their incorporation into the Gospels or Acts. In doing this, they distinguish between *tradition* (the source material originally available to the author) and *framework* (the material added to the source when it was incorporated into the book of which it is now a part).

This works best when the sources have been identified through external analysis.

For material in Matthew or Luke that has a parallel in Mark, the Markan parallel is usually thought to represent the source for what is in Matthew or Luke. Accordingly, the material in Matthew or Luke that is identical with what is in the Markan parallel may be designated “tradition,” and the material that differs from what is in the Markan parallel may be designated “framework.”

For material that is parallel in Matthew and Luke but not in Mark, the source is thought to have been “Q,” which is now lost to us. When the parallel passages in Matthew and Luke are identical, this material may be designated “tradition.” When the parallel passages in Matthew and Luke differ, one of the two readings can perhaps be designated “tradition” and the other “framework,” but a judgment must be made as to which reading most likely represents the original source.

Designation of tradition and framework is less certain with regard to sources identified through internal analysis. Sometimes, however, source critics will designate as “tradition” the material that is more consistent linguistically, thematically, or theologically with other material ascribed to the source than with the document as a whole.

Why Source Critics Do This

Scholars who are interested in the historical period of Jesus and his earliest followers believe that even tentative reconstructions of early written sources are more likely to be representative of this period than the edited material in the Gospels and Acts.

Scholars who are interested in the history of the early church believe the reconstructed sources offer direct testimony to the concerns of the church during the period before the Gospels and Acts were written.

Scholars who are interested in the concerns of the evangelists believe that the identification and possible reconstruction of sources allows them to discern better the distinctive interests of the evangelists evident in their editing of these sources.

Bibliography of Classic Works

Overview

Kümmel, Werner Georg. *Introduction to the New Testament*. Rev. ed. Nashville: Abingdon, 1975. A basic survey with information on sources for all four Gospels and Acts.

On Sources for Matthew and Luke

Farmer, William. *The Synoptic Problem. A Critical Analysis*. Rev. ed. Dillsboro: Western North Carolina Press, 1976. A history of the discussion by someone who does not accept the dominant view. Concludes with a critique of B. H. Streeter (see below) and support for what is now called the Two-Gospel Hypothesis (the view that Luke used Matthew, while Mark used both Matthew and Luke).

Goodacre, Mark. *The Case against Q: Studies in Markan Priority and the Synoptic Problem*. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2002. Offers support for what is called the “Farrer Theory”: Matthew and Luke used Mark as a source, but not Q; instead, Luke used Matthew as a source, explaining the overlap between Matthew and Luke sometimes ascribed to Q.

Streeter, B. H. *The Four Gospels: A Study of the Origins, Treating of the Manuscript Tradition, Sources, Authorship, and Dates*.

London: Macmillan, 1924. Contains the original statement of what has been revised and developed to become the dominant view: Matthew used Mark, Q, and M, while Luke used Mark, Q, and L.

On Sources for Mark

Achtemeier, Paul J. "Toward the Isolation of Pre-Markan Miracle

Catenae." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 89 (1970): 265–91; "The Origin and Function of the Pre-Markan Miracle Catenae."

Journal of Biblical Literature 91 (1972): 198–221. Definitive statement of the view that Mark used a collection of miracle stories as one source in composing his Gospel.

Matera, Frank J. *What Are They Saying about Mark?* New York:

Paulist Press, 1987. Chapter 4 contains summaries of the important theories of Rudolf Pesch and Heinz-Wolfgang Kuhn, whose works are not available in English.

On Sources for John

Bultmann, Rudolf. *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*. Philadelphia:

Westminster, 1971. A classic interpretation that assumes three sources: a "signs source," a "discourse source," and a "passion narrative."

Fortna, R. T. *The Gospel of Signs*. SNTSMS 11. Cambridge:

Cambridge University Press, 1970. Contends that the "signs

source” that Rudolf Bultmann (see above) identified was actually an early Gospel in its own right. See also Fortna’s *The Fourth Gospel and Its Predecessor: From Narrative Source to Present Gospel*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988.

Kysar, Robert. “The Evangelist and His Tradition.” In *The Fourth Evangelist and His Gospel: An Examination of Contemporary Scholarship*, 9–82. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1975. A survey of the most important works on this subject.

Lindars, Barnabas. *Behind the Fourth Gospel*. London: SPCK, 1971. Presents a developmental model through which the Gospel was produced in stages. Compare the view of Raymond Brown in *The Gospel According to John*. 2nd ed. AB 29, 29A. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1979.

On Sources for Acts

Dibelius, Martin. *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*. Edited by Heinrich Greeven. Translated by Mary Ling. 1941. Reprint, New York: Scribner, 1956. Proposes that Luke used a travel diary as a source for Acts.

von Harnack, Adolf. *The Acts of the Apostles*. Translated by J. R. Wilkinson. London: Williams & Norgate, 1909. The original proposal that Luke used various “local sources” (including Antioch traditions) in composing Acts.

Wilcox, Max. *The Semitisms of Acts*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1965. Argues that Luke had Aramaic sources for Acts but has

integrated them into the document so well that they cannot be reconstructed.

3.11

Form Criticism of the Gospels and Acts

Presuppositions of Form Criticism

- There was a period of oral transmission prior to the writing of the Gospels and Acts.
- During this period, small units of material that could be easily remembered circulated independently.
- These small units exhibit characteristics that allow them to be classified as particular types of material. The defining characteristics may be related to structure (a typical outline), language (similar wording), or content (a common theme).
- These units served different needs for the early Christian communities and were remembered or developed in ways appropriate to the settings in life (*Sitz im Leben*) that they were intended to serve (see below).
- These small oral units were collected, organized, and edited when they were incorporated into our four Gospels and the book of Acts.

What Form Critics Do

Form critics try to identify where small units of oral tradition have been incorporated into the written documents of the Gospels and Acts. They look for material in which structural patterns or other rhetorical features typical of oral transmission are evident. They also

look for material that, at least in part, appears to address a setting in life (*Sitz im Leben*) other than what might be presupposed for the document as a whole.

Form-Critical Classifications

Form critics classify units of tradition according to typical form-critical categories. (Note that all of these categories are descriptive and not fixed. They may also overlap.)

Sayings: memorable quotations that may have been preserved apart from any particular context

Wisdom sayings provide insight into how life really works:

“Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”

(Luke 12:34).

“If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand” (Mark 3:24).

Prophetic sayings proclaim the activity or judgment of God:

“The kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe”

(Mark 1:15).

Eschatological sayings reflect the view that the future is of primary importance:

“The Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done” (Matt. 16:27).

Legal sayings interpret God’s will:

“In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets” (Matt. 7:12).

“*I*” sayings are autobiographical:

“I have come to call not the righteous but sinners” (Mark 2:17).

“I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”
(John 10:10)

Pronouncement Stories: short narratives of incidents that provide context for memorable quotations (these sometimes are called “apophthegms” or “paradigms”)

Correction stories preserve a saying that corrects a mistaken point of view:

forgive seventy-seven times (Matt. 18:21–22)

whoever is not against us (Mark 9:38–40)

Commendation stories preserve a saying that blesses someone or endorses a particular idea or type of behavior:

the confession of Peter (Matt. 16:13–20)

the generous widow (Mark 12:41–44)

Controversy stories preserve a saying that explains, resolves, or defines a conflict:

Jesus’s disciples don’t fast (Mark 2:18–22)

paying taxes to Caesar (Mark 12:13–17)

Biographical stories recall significant moments in a person's life:

cleansing of the temple (Mark 11:15–17)

Didactic stories recall occasions in which a person's teaching was particularly relevant:

the true family of Jesus (Mark 3:31–35)

Parables: longer sayings that function as extended figures of speech (similes, metaphors, allegories, etc.)

the parable of the sower in Mark 4:3–8

Speeches: extensive reports of discourse that purport to represent what individuals said on particular occasions. Speeches differ from mere “collections of sayings” in that they are more unified thematically and usually evince particular rhetorical strategies.

Evangelistic speeches may use deliberative rhetoric to urge the audience to decision or action

the speech of Paul in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:16–41)

Defense speeches may use judicial rhetoric to refute charges and claim innocence

the speech of Paul in Jerusalem (Acts 22:3–21)

Commissioning Stories: narrative accounts of persons or groups receiving calls to participate in the divine plan

Jesus's call of Levi in Mark 2:14

Miracle Stories: narrative accounts of people displaying extraordinary power

exorcisms (e.g., Mark 5:1–20)

healing miracles (e.g., Mark 5:25–34)

resuscitations (e.g., Mark 5:21–24, 35–43)

nature miracles (e.g., Mark 4:35–41)

feeding miracles (e.g., Mark 8:1–10)

Hymns: words to canticles or songs that may be distinguished by particular metrical patterns or by poetic devices such as alliteration, parallelism, and chiasm

the “Magnificat” in Luke 1:46–55

Genealogies: narrative lists that trace the line of descent for persons or groups

genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1:1–17

Legends: narrative accounts of persons earning renown or glory

Jesus's entry into Jerusalem (Mark 11:1–10)

Myths: narrative accounts of people interacting with supernatural beings

Jesus's temptation (Matt. 4:1–11) and transfiguration (Mark 9:2–8)

Sitz im Leben: The Original Setting in Life

Form critics try to identify the probable *Sitz im Leben* (setting in life) each unit of tradition might have served prior to its incorporation into a larger written document. Among other questions, form critics ask, “Why was this material remembered? What purpose did it serve for those who preserved it?”

Common suggestions for *Sitz im Leben* include:

preaching

catechetics

polemics

discipline

worship

entertainment

Reconstruction

Form critics sometimes try to reconstruct what the units of tradition may have looked like prior to their incorporation into the documents. They distinguish between “tradition” (the material prior to incorporation) and “framework” (the material added to the unit when it was incorporated). Once a pericope is identified as deriving from oral tradition, editorial additions (framework) sometimes can be identified by recognizing parts of the pericope that are atypical for

material of this type (e.g., a unit classified as an “exorcism story” that exhibits features atypical for exorcism stories). Likewise, editorial additions may also be recognized when portions of a pericope serve a *Sitz im Leben* different from that which would be supposed for the stage of oral transmission.

Why Form Critics Do This

Scholars who are interested in the historical period of Jesus and his earliest followers believe that the reconstructed units of oral tradition are more likely to be representative of this period than is the edited material in the Gospels and Acts.

Scholars who are interested in the history of the early church believe that the reconstructed units of oral tradition offer direct testimony to the concerns of the church during the period before the Gospels and Acts were written.

Scholars who are interested in the concerns of the evangelists believe that the reconstructed units of oral tradition represent sources that these writers used when they composed the Gospels and Acts, and that distinctive interests of the evangelists can be discerned through analysis of their editing of these sources.

Bibliography of Classic Texts

The three classic studies:

Bultmann, Rudolf. *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*. Translated by John Marsh. 3rd ed. 1921. Reprint, New York: Harper & Row, 1963.

Dibelius, Martin. *From Tradition to Gospel*. Translated by Bertram Lee Woolf. 2nd ed. 1919. Reprint, New York: Scribner, 1965.

Taylor, Vincent. *The Formation of the Gospel Tradition*. 2nd ed. London: MacMillan, 1935.

A helpful modern handbook that includes more extensive bibliography:

Bailey, James L., and Lyle D. VanderBroek. *Literary Forms in the New Testament: A Handbook*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992.

3.12

Redaction Criticism of the Gospels

The goal of redaction criticism is to uncover the particular theologies of the individual evangelists by analyzing the manner in which they “redacted” (or edited) their Gospels.

Presuppositions of Redaction Criticism

- The Gospel authors were not eyewitnesses for much that they report; they had to rely on oral and written reports passed on to them by others.
- The Gospel authors did have such sources: some written materials regarding words and deeds of Jesus and his followers and many accounts that had come to them through oral tradition.
- The Gospel authors were not just “scissors and paste” collectors interested in preserving these source materials; they wanted to tell coherent stories that would be rhetorically effective, and they had to edit the source materials to make them fit into their narratives.
- The Gospel authors were not disinterested reporters but “evangelists” with distinctive theological commitments and ideals; they edited their source materials accordingly.

What Redaction Critics Do

Redaction critics analyze the Gospel narratives to detect editorial tendencies. This analysis is of two basic types.

Emendation Analysis

This type of analysis attempts to discern an author's distinctive interests by observing changes that have been made in the source material. This procedure presupposes possession of the source material so that comparisons between the Gospel and its source can be made.

Emendation analysis works best in study of those portions of Matthew and Luke that are thought to be derived from Mark, because the text from Matthew or Luke can be compared side by side with that of Mark, and the changes that either Matthew or Luke made can be clearly seen. Examples include:

- In Mark 4:40, Jesus says to his disciples, "Why are you afraid? Have you still *no faith?*"
- In Matthew 8:26, he says, "Why are you afraid, you of *little faith?*"

The dominant theory is that Matthew had a copy of Mark's Gospel and changed the words "no faith" to "little faith." This affects how Matthew's readers perceived Jesus's disciples, and it may reveal something about Matthew's understanding of discipleship.

Emendation analysis is less helpful in the study of Matthew/Luke parallels where the apparent source was not Mark's Gospel but, possibly, a now lost document that scholars call "Q." Examples include:

- In Luke 6:20, Jesus says, “Blessed are *you who are poor*.”
- In Matthew 5:3, he says, “Blessed are *the poor in spirit*.”

The dominant theory is that the source used by Matthew and Luke (Q) said either “you who are poor” or “the poor in spirit,” and one of the two Gospels (Matthew or Luke) changed it; however, it is difficult to know which one made the change.

Emendation analysis seems to be least helpful in the study of Mark, John, or passages unique to Matthew (“M” material) or Luke (“L” material). Even then, however, the distinction between “tradition” and “framework” material made by source and form critics allows for some application of the method.

Composition Analysis

This type of analysis attempts to discern an author’s distinctive interests by noting how individual units have been ordered and arranged in the work as a whole.

First, composition analysis includes general observations regarding the overall structure of a Gospel. Example:

- The Gospel of Luke devotes ten chapters (9:51–19:40) to describing a journey that Jesus makes to Jerusalem, a trip that appears to be covered in about half a chapter elsewhere (Mark 10:32–52). This affects the plot of Luke’s overall story and reveals something distinctive about Luke’s perspective.

Second, composition analysis is used to examine the immediate contexts of individual passages in the Gospels. Example:

- In Matthew 18:15–20, Jesus outlines procedures for removing an unrepentant sinner from the church. In the immediately preceding passage (18:10–14), Jesus relates the parable of the lost sheep, in which he concludes, “It is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost” (18:14). And in the very next passage, Matthew presents an episode in which Jesus insists that his followers should forgive each other repeatedly (18:21–22). Thus Matthew has deliberately chosen to sandwich the harsh words dealing with possible expulsion between stories that emphasize forgiveness and mercy. This affects how Matthew’s reader hears the harsh words, and it reveals something about Matthew’s own theological priorities.

Pioneer Works in Redaction Criticism

New Testament redaction criticism began in Europe in the 1950s. It took a few years for works to be translated and produced in English, but the most important volumes for defining the discipline were these three studies of the Synoptic Gospels:

Bornkamm, Günther, Gerhard Barth, and Heinz Joachim Held.

Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew. Translated by Percy Scott. NTL. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963.

Conzelmann, Hans. *The Theology of Saint Luke*. Philadelphia:

Fortress, 1961.

Marxsen, Willi. *Mark the Evangelist: Studies on the Redaction*

History of the Gospel. Nashville: Abingdon, 1969.

3.13

Narrative Criticism of the Gospels and Acts

Narrative criticism is a branch of literary criticism that entails a variety of established methodologies and approaches. According to this discipline, a “narrative” is any work of literature that tells a “story.” This is a very broad definition, but not all literature is narrative. Essays, for example, are not.

In the Bible, the best examples of narrative are the four Gospels and Acts. Much material in the Old Testament qualifies as well, but prophetic oracles and New Testament epistles do not. Some scholars employ narrative criticism to study the underlying story that appears to be assumed by these writings (e.g., the story of Paul’s relationship with the Corinthian church that underlies his letters to that community), but narrative criticism is used most prominently in the study of the Gospels and Acts.

Narrative criticism views the Gospels as communications between an “implied author” and an “implied reader.”

implied author: the author as he or she may be reconstructed from the text; the sum total of the impressions (values, worldview, etc.) that the reader gains from the narrative

implied reader: the reader presupposed by the text; the imaginary person who is to be envisioned as always

responding to the text with whatever knowledge,
understanding, action, or emotion is called for

The Goal of Narrative Criticism

The goal of narrative criticism is to read the Gospels in the manner intended by their implied author and in the manner expected of their implied reader. To determine what this expected response would be, modern readers must use their imagination in order to approach the text in the following ways:

1. *As a person who receives the text in the manner the author assumed it would be received.* For a Shakespearean play, this might mean seeing the work performed on stage (as opposed to reading a script). For a Gospel, it might mean hearing the entire Gospel read out loud from beginning to end at a single sitting.
2. *As a person who knows everything the author expected the reader to know, but no more than this.* The reader of a Gospel is expected to know the Old Testament and certain things about the Roman world but probably is not expected to know material from the other Gospels or doctrinal propositions from later Christianity.
3. *As a person who believes everything the author expected the reader to believe, but nothing other than this.* The reader of any one of our four Gospels is assumed to hold certain

beliefs and values that may or may not coincide with beliefs or values of modern readers today (e.g., the reader may be expected to believe that demons are literal beings; that ghosts actually exist; that slavery is an acceptable social institution; that women are intrinsically inferior to men). To determine the response expected of an implied reader, modern readers must ask, “How would a reader with these assumed beliefs and values respond to this story?”

Note that narrative criticism temporarily brackets out questions of historicity or interpretation in order to first understand the Gospels on their own terms.

Story and Discourse

Every narrative may be understood in terms of story and discourse. “Story” refers to what the narrative is about: the events, characters, and settings that make up its plot. “Discourse” refers to how the narrative is told: the way in which the events, characters, and settings are presented to the reader.

What Narrative Critics Do

Narrative critics analyze *events*, *characters*, and *settings* in terms of both story and discourse. What follows here is a survey of some questions that they typically ask.

Events

1. *Story*. What is it that happens in each episode of the story, and how do the individual episodes relate to what happens in the story as a whole?

Events may be classified as:

kernel: event that is integral to the narrative, such that the event could not be deleted without destroying the logic of the plot. Kernels represent the major turning points in the narrative.

satellite: event that is not crucial to the narrative but fills in the story line as determined by the kernels. A satellite could be removed from the narrative without destroying the logic of the plot, though of course it might weaken the story aesthetically. If an event is regarded as a satellite, the next question is, “To which of the kernels is it related?”

Narrative critics also ask, “What elements of conflict are present in each episode, and how do these relate to the development and resolution of conflict in the story as a whole?” Conflict may be described in terms of threats that characters or other elements in the story pose to one another. As conflict develops in the narrative, its nature may change: a new threat may be added or an existing one removed. Or the essence of the conflict may remain the same, with changes only in its intensity. Conflict that is left unresolved in the narrative tends to impinge most directly on the reader.

2. *Discourse*. How does the author incorporate individual events into the narrative? What rhetorical techniques does the author use?

Examples of rhetorical technique include foreshadowing, suspense, irony, symbolism, and narrative patterns (framing, step progression, concentric patterns, etc.).

Particular questions about the narration of events involve:

order: the place that the narration of each event occupies in the sequence of other events in the narrative

duration: the length of time taken up in the narrative with each event relative to the duration of other events in the narrative

frequency: the number of times each event is narrated or referred to in the narrative

Narrative critics also examine events in terms of causality: What is the link between each event and other events in terms of cause and effect?

possibility: event makes the occurrence of another event possible

probability: event makes the occurrence of another event more likely

contingency: event makes the occurrence of another event necessary

Characters

1. *Story*. Who are the characters and what type of characters are they? What traits are assigned to the characters? Are these traits consistent throughout the narrative? “Traits” may be defined as “persistent personal qualities that describe the character involved” (Sherlock Holmes is “perceptive”; Ebenezer Scrooge is “stingy”).

What is the point of view of the characters, and does it concur with the point of view of the implied author or narrator? Is this consistent throughout the narrative? “Point of view” may be defined as the norms, values, and general worldview that govern the way a character looks at things and renders judgments upon them.

Character groups: Consistency of traits and point of view sometimes indicate that various characters belong to a “character group” that is treated as a single character throughout the narrative. For example, the disciples of Jesus in the Gospels often function as a group of people who act and think alike. When the Gospel reports, “The disciples said . . . ,” the reader is not expected to think that they spoke in unison but rather that they spoke as though they were a single character.

Types of characters include:

round: exhibits inconsistent or unpredictable traits

flat: exhibits consistent and predictable traits

stock: exhibits only one trait or very few consistent ones

dynamic: shows development or change in basic profile
(i.e., traits and point of view) over the course of the
narrative

static: basic profile remains the same through the
narrative

Opposition of characters: Divergence of point of view and
incompatibility of traits between characters and character
groups often forms the basis for the development of conflict.

Readers tend to regard characters with empathy, sympathy, or
antipathy:

empathy: reader identifies with the character and experiences
the story from that character's point of view (empathy may be
either realistic or idealistic)

sympathy: reader may or may not identify with the character,
but feels favorably disposed to the character

antipathy: reader may or may not identify with the character,
but feels unfavorably disposed to the character

Readers typically feel sympathy for characters for whom the
protagonist feels sympathy and antipathy for characters for whom
the protagonist feels antipathy.

2. *Discourse*. What method of characterization does the author use in the narrative? How do readers know what the characters are like (in terms of traits and point of view)?

telling: narrator describes the characters for the reader from the implied author's own point of view (e.g., "Joseph was a just man.")

showing: narrator describes the characters from the point of view of other characters within the story by reporting the actions, speech, thoughts, or beliefs of those characters (e.g., when Jesus says that the Pharisees are hypocrites, the reader gets some impression of both Jesus and the Pharisees)

Four planes of expression on which characters may be revealed:

spatial-temporal: actions of the characters in space and time

phraseological: speech, including thoughts if they are verbalized as speech

psychological: inside views of the character's motives

ideological: norms, values, and general worldview ascribed to the character

Narrative critics notice which of these planes are used to reveal characters to readers.

“Incongruity” occurs when the author provides conflicting characterization: a character’s own self-description may differ from the perception of that character attributed to others, or a character’s speech may present the character differently than the character’s actions (Herod says that he wants to worship Jesus but then tries to kill him). The reader must decide which level of characterization is the more reliable.

Settings

1. *Story*. What are the place, time, and social situation settings for the story, and does this have any special significance?

Settings may be *spatial*, *temporal*, or *social*.

Spatial settings include the physical environment (geographical and architectural locations) in which the characters live, as well as the “props” and “furniture” (articles of clothing, modes of transportation, etc.) that make up this environment.

Temporal settings include the broad sweep or concept of time assumed by the narrative (“monumental time”), as well as the chronological and typological references to time as it is measured by the characters in the story (“mortal time”). Examples of monumental time: “the days of Noah,” “the age of the church.” Examples of mortal time: “year,” “day,” “night,” “Sabbath.”

Social settings include the political institutions, class structure, economic systems, social customs, and general cultural context assumed to be operative in the narrative (e.g., the social institution of

slavery is part of the social setting for *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; the Roman occupation of Palestine is part of the social setting for all four New Testament Gospels).

Settings may be symbolic:

the wilderness: a place of testing

the sea: a place of danger

night: a time for secrecy

Settings may be set in opposition to each other:

day and night

land and sea

heaven and earth

Certain settings may also serve as boundaries that bridge such oppositions:

evening or dawn may be a boundary between day and night

a beach, a boat, or an island may be a boundary between land and sea

a mountain may be a boundary between heaven and earth

2. *Discourse*. How does the author or narrator describe the settings for the reader?

Settings may be described with either an abundance or a paucity of detail. How much is left to the reader's imagination? What is the reader simply assumed to know?

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3.14

Rhetorical Criticism

The focus of rhetorical criticism is on the strategies employed by the author of a work to achieve particular purposes. Aristotle formulated a theory that allowed for three “species” of rhetoric:¹

judicial: accuses or defends

deliberative: offers advice

epideictic: praises or blames

Phyllis Trible has offered this helpful summary of these three types of rhetoric:²

	Judicial	Deliberative	Epideictic
focus	justice	expediency	adulation/denunciation
setting	law court	public assembly	public ceremony
purpose	to persuade	to persuade	to please or inspire
time	past	future	present
emphasis	speech	audience	speaker

Thus rhetorical critics are interested not only in the point that a work wishes to make but also in the basis on which that point is established (the types of arguments or proofs that are used): sometimes external evidence or documentation may be cited; sometimes the trustworthy character of the writer is invoked; at other times, an appeal is made to the readers’ emotions or sense of logic.

Trible identifies three primary “goals of communication”:

1. intellectual goal of teaching
2. emotional goal of touching the feelings
3. aesthetic goal of pleasing so as to hold attention

In New Testament studies, rhetorical criticism has been used mainly in studies of epistles or of portions of the Gospels and Acts that may be isolated as distinctive units (e.g., speeches).

Two sample studies:

1. Hans Dieter Betz interprets Paul's letter to the Galatians as an instance of judicial rhetoric in which Paul defends his ministry and apostleship.³
2. George Kennedy discusses the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's Gospel (Matt. 5–7) as a speech that employs deliberative rhetoric: it offers advice to disciples on how to live if they want to inherit the blessings of the kingdom of heaven.⁴

1. See Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric* 3.1.1358a; also *The Poetics*.

2. See Phyllis Trible, *Rhetorical Criticism*, GBS (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 9.

3. See Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979).

4. See George Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 39–72.

3.15

Reader-Response Criticism

Polyvalence

Reader-response critics are interested in the phenomenon of “polyvalence”—why texts mean different things to different people. They pay special attention to four factors that often cause readers to understand or experience texts differently.

Social Location

The social location of a reader refers to identifying characteristics such as age, gender, nationality, race, health, career, social class, personality type, and marital status. Readers who share certain aspects of one social location tend to understand texts in similar ways that can be distinguished from understandings produced by readers from a different social location.

Reading Strategy

The manner in which a text is received affects the way in which it is interpreted. For example, if a text is heard out loud, it might be understood differently than if it is read silently. If a section of a text is read as a pericope, it might be understood differently than if it is encountered as an episode in a longer work. If a book is read as a part of a larger book (“the Bible”), it might be understood differently than if it is read as a freestanding work.

Empathy Choice

With narrative literature, readers will experience the meaning of a story differently depending on the characters with whom they most identify.

Conception of Meaning

Diverse interpretations of a text's meaning are determined at a basic level by different philosophical concepts of what constitutes meaning (a cognitive message to be passed from author to reader, or an affective or emotive response produced in readers through the experience of receiving the text).

Expected and Unexpected Readings

Some reader-response critics classify different interpretations or responses to texts as expected or unexpected readings. An "expected reading" is one that seems to be invited by signals within the text itself. An "unexpected reading" is one in which factors extrinsic to the text seem to resist or ignore the text's signals. In terms of narrative criticism, an expected reading is one that is compatible with the response of a text's implied readers, while an unexpected reading is one that is incompatible with the response of a text's implied readers.

For example, imagine four people reading the story of the passion of Christ recorded in Matthew 26–27. They respond emotionally to the narrative:

Reader One is *inspired* by the story because it presents Jesus as a man of integrity who is willing to die nobly for his convictions.

Reader Two is *traumatized* by the story because it reveals the depth of human depravity on the part of those who denounce, betray, and torture an innocent man.

Reader Three is *comforted* by the story because it portrays Jesus's death as an atoning sacrifice through which God offers forgiveness and mercy to the undeserving.

Reader Four is *delighted* by the story because it reports the gruesome execution of a meddling busybody who tried to tell everyone how they should live.

Reader-response critics would classify the first three responses as expected readings: though very different from one another, all three respond to cues within the text (and so exemplify polyvalent responses). The critics would classify the fourth response as an unexpected reading: it responds to the story in a way that the narrative does not solicit or invite.

4.0

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4.2

The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus

(Box 4.2)

Jesus often teaches about “the kingdom of God.” Sometimes he appears to be talking about the present reign of God in human lives; other times he appears to be talking about a future realm where people will live forever with God in heaven. Frequently his references to “the kingdom of God” appear to entail both meanings. The kingdom of God is a phenomenon that cannot be limited by time or space; it is both present reign and future realm.

- “Strive first for the kingdom of God and [God’s] righteousness” (Matt. 6:33; cf. Luke 12:31).
- “If it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you” (Matt. 12:28; cf. Luke 11:20).
- “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news” (Mark 1:15; cf. Matt. 4:17).
- “The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how” (Mark 4:26–27).

- “There are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power” (Mark 9:1; cf. Matt. 16:28; Luke 9:27).
- “It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell” (Mark 9:47).
- “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs” (Mark 10:14; cf. Matt. 19:14; Luke 18:16).
- “Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it” (Mark 10:15; cf. Matt. 18:3).
- “How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God” (Mark 10:23; cf. Matt. 19:23; Luke 18:24).
- “I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God” (Mark 14:25).
- “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God” (Luke 6:20).
- “There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrown out” (Luke 13:28).
- “The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There it is!’ For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you” (Luke 17:20–21).

- “No one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above” (John 3:3).

Compare These References from the Letters of Paul

- “The kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17).
- “The kingdom of God depends not on talk but on power” (1 Cor. 4:20).
- “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 15:50).

4.3

Some Sayings of Jesus (Box 5.7)

Wisdom sayings provide insight into how life really works:

- “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Luke 12:34).
- “If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand” (Mark 3:24).

Prophetic sayings proclaim the activity or judgment of God:

- “The kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news” (Mark 1:15).

Eschatological sayings reflect the view that the future is of primary importance:

- “The Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done” (Matt. 16:27).

Legal sayings interpret God’s will:

- “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets” (Matt. 7:12).

“I” sayings are autobiographical:

- “I have come to call not the righteous but sinners” (Mark 2:17).

- “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly”
(John 10:10).

4.4

Parables in the Gospels (Box 5.3)

Parable	Matthew	Mark	Luke
New patch on an old cloak	9:16	2:21	5:36
New wine in old wineskins	9:17	2:22	5:37–38
The sower	13:3–8	4:3–8	8:5–8
Lamp under a bowl	5:14–16	4:21–22	8:16; 11:33
Seed growing secretly		4:26–29	
Mustard seed	13:31–32	4:30–32	13:18–19
Wicked tenants	21:33–44	12:1–11	20:9–18
Fig tree	24:32–33	13:28–29	21:29–31
Watchful slaves		13:33–37	12:35–38
Wise and foolish builders	7:24–27		6:47–49
Yeast leavens flour	13:33		13:20–21
Lost sheep	18:12–14		15:4–7
Thief in the night	24:42–44		12:39–40
Faithful and wise slave	24:45–51		12:42–48
The talents (or the pounds)	25:14–30		19:12–27
Weeds among the wheat	13:24–30		
Treasure hidden in a field	13:44		
Pearl of great value	13:45–46		
Net full of good and bad fish	13:47–50		
Treasure new and old	13:52		
Unmerciful servant	18:23–34		
Workers in the vineyard	20:1–16		
Two sons	21:28–32		
Wedding banquet	22:2–14		
Ten bridesmaids	25:1–13		
The two debtors			7:41–43
The good Samaritan			10:30–37
Friend at midnight			11:5–8
Rich fool			12:16–21
Severe and light beatings			12:47–48
Barren tree			13:6–9
Lowest seat at a banquet			14:7–14
Excuses for not attending a banquet			14:16–24

Parable	Matthew	Mark	Luke
Building a tower			14:28–30
Waging war			14:31–32
Lost coin			15:8–10
Prodigal son			15:11–32
Shrewd manager			16:1–9
Rich man and Lazarus			16:19–31
Slave serves the master			17:7–10
Widow and judge			18:2–5
Pharisee and tax collector			18:10–14

4.5

Miracles of Jesus Reported in the Four Gospels

(Box 5.5)

	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Healings and Exorcisms				
Demoniac in synagogue		1:23–26	4:33–35	
Peter's mother-in-law	8:14–15	1:30–31	4:38–39	
Man with leprosy	8:2–4	1:40–42	5:12–13	
Paralytic	9:2–7	2:3–12	5:18–25	
Man with withered hand	12:10–13	3:1–5	6:6–10	
Gadarene demoniac(s)	8:28–34	5:1–15	8:27–35	
Woman with hemorrhage	9:20–22	5:25–34	8:43–48	
Gentile woman's daughter	15:21–28	7:24–30		
Deaf mute		7:31–37		
Blind man at Bethsaida		8:22–26		
Demon-possessed boy	17:14–18	9:17–29		
Blind Bartimaeus (and companion?)	20:29–34?	10:46–52		
Centurion's servant	8:5–13		7:1–10	4:46–54
(Blind) mute demoniac	12:22		11:14	
Two blind men	9:27–31			
Mute demoniac	9:32–33			
Crippled woman			13:11–13	
Man with dropsy			14:1–4	
Ten lepers			17:11–19	
High priest's servant			22:50–51	
Invalid at Pool of Bethesda				5:1–9
Man born blind				9:1–7
Resuscitation (dead brought back to life)				
Jairus's daughter	9:18–25	5:22–42	8:41–56	
Widow's son			7:11–15	
Lazarus				11:1–44

	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Provision				
Five thousand people fed	14:15–21	6:35–44	9:12–17	6:5–13
Four thousand people fed	15:32–38	8:1–9		
Catch of fish			5:1–11	
Changing water into wine				2:1–11
Post-Easter catch of fish				21:1–11
Miscellaneous				
Calming a storm at sea	8:23–27	4:37–41	8:22–25	
Walking on water	14:25	6:48–51		6:19–21
Transfiguration	17:1–8	9:2–8	9:28–36	
Withering a fig tree	21:18–22	11:12–25		
Predicting coin in fish's mouth	17:24–27			
Vanishing at Emmaus		24:31		
Appearing in Jerusalem				20:19, 26

4.6

Four Pictures of Jesus (Box 5.1)

- The Gospel of Matthew presents Jesus as the one who abides with his people always until the end of time. Jesus founds the church, in which sins are forgiven, prayers are answered, and the power of death is overcome (Matt. 16:18–19; 18:18–20).
- The Gospel of Mark presents Jesus as the one who announces the advent of God’s reign, in which the humble are exalted and the proud brought low. Obedient to this rule, he dies on a cross, giving his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45).
- The Gospel of Luke presents Jesus as the one whose words and deeds liberate those who are oppressed. Jesus comes to seek and to save the lost and to bring release to all those whom he describes as “captives” (Luke 4:18; 19:10).
- The Gospel of John presents Jesus as the one who reveals what God is truly like. Jesus is the Word of God made flesh, and he reveals through his words and deeds all that can be known of God (John 1:14; 14:8).

4.7

Death of Jesus in Each of the Four Gospels

Jesus speaks seven times from the cross, but not seven times in any one Gospel. The Gospels relate three very different stories regarding Jesus’s dying words. In one story, Jesus speaks only once; in a second, he speaks three times; and in a third, he speaks another three times. However, there are no parallels between what is said in any one of these three stories and what is said in the other two stories.

Story A	Story B	Story C
Matthew and Mark	Luke	John
“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34)	“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” (Luke 23:34)	“Woman, here is your son . . . Here is your mother.” (John 19:26–27)
	“Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.” (Luke 23:43)	“I am thirsty.” (John 19:28)
	“Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.” (Luke 23:46)	“It is finished.” (John 19:30)

What Happens When Jesus Dies?

In each of our four New Testament Gospels, the events that are narrated immediately after Jesus’s death may indicate a primary concern for that particular book.

The Gospel of Mark

Immediately after Jesus dies, Mark tells us that the curtain in the Jerusalem temple tore from top to bottom (15:38) and that the centurion recognized that Jesus was the Son of God (15:39).

One interpretation: Mark believes that Jesus's death has provided a ransom for sin (10:45), making the sacrificial cult of the Jerusalem temple obsolete. Mark also wants to tell his readers that it is only through the cross that one can come to understand fully who Jesus is.

The Gospel of Matthew

Immediately after Jesus dies, Matthew tells us that the curtain in the Jerusalem temple tore in two and that an earthquake opened tombs in the cemetery such that the bodies of many saints came back to life and came out of their tombs. Then the centurion proclaimed that Jesus was the Son of God (27:51–54).

One interpretation: Matthew, like Mark, believes that Jesus's death has provided a once-for-all-time sacrifice for sin, but Matthew also wants to stress that Jesus's death opens the door to life after death. It is in the context of this eternal dimension that he is to be regarded as the Son of God.

The Gospel of Luke

Immediately after Jesus dies, Luke tells us that the gentile centurion began to praise God, acknowledging Jesus's innocence, and that the

multitudes who were present returned home, beating their breasts in repentance (23:47–48).

One interpretation: Luke is less concerned than Mark and Matthew with reflection on the theological meaning of Jesus's death (i.e., its redemptive or atoning effect); however, Luke is more concerned than the other Gospels with the proper *response* of people to what Jesus has done. Luke believes that the word of the cross should lead people to worship and repentance.

The Gospel of John

Immediately after Jesus dies, John tells us that his side was pierced with a spear causing water and blood to gush forth (19:31–34).

One interpretation: John's Gospel is often heavily symbolic and water and blood are almost universal symbols for life. The flow of water and blood from a person's body is reminiscent of what happens when a woman gives birth. John may be implying that, even as Jesus dies, he gives birth to a new life for all those who believe in him.

4.8

Images and Titles for Jesus in the New Testament

(Box 4.4)

Advocate	1 John 2:1
Alpha and Omega	Rev. 21:6
Apostle	Heb. 3:1
Author of Life	Acts 3:15
Bread of Life	John 6:35
Bridegroom	Mark 2:19–20
Brother	Matt. 25:40
Chief Cornerstone	Eph. 2:20
Chief Shepherd	1 Pet. 5:4
Christ (Messiah)	Mark 8:29
Emmanuel	Matt. 1:23
Firstborn from the Dead	Col. 1:18
Firstborn of Creation	Col. 1:15
Friend	John 15:13–15
The Gate	John 10:7
God	Titus 2:13
Good Shepherd	John 10:11
Guarantee	Heb. 7:22
Head of the Body	Col. 1:18
Heir	Heb. 1:2
High Priest	Heb. 3:1
Holy One of God	Mark 1:24
Image of God	Col. 1:15
Judge	Acts 10:42
King	Matt. 25:40
King of Kings	Rev. 19:16
Lamb of God	John 1:29
The Life	John 14:6
Light of the World	John 9:5
Lion of Judah	Rev. 5:5
Lord	Rom. 10:9
Lord of Glory	1 Cor. 2:8

Lord of Lords	Rev. 19:16
Master	Luke 17:13
Mediator	1 Tim. 2:5
Minister	Heb. 8:2
Morning Star	Rev. 22:16
Our Peace	Eph. 2:14
Perfecter of Faith	Heb. 12:2
Pioneer	Heb. 12:2
Prophet	Luke 13:33
Rabbi	John 3:2
The Resurrection	John 11:25
Root of David	Rev. 5:5
Root of Jesse	Rom. 15:12
Sanctifier	Heb. 2:11
Savior	Luke 2:11
Savior of the World	John 4:42
Second Adam	Rom. 12:5–19
Servant	Mark 10:45
Son of Abraham	Matt. 1:1
Son of David	Matt. 9:27
Son of God	John 20:31
Son of Man	Matt. 20:28
Spirit	Acts 16:7
Teacher	John 13:13
The Truth	John 14:6
The Vine	John 15:5
The Way	John 14:6
The Word	John 1:1

4.9

Jesus as God: New Testament References (Box 4.5)

The following verses often are cited as examples of instances in which the New Testament refers to Jesus as God:

- “the Word was God” (John 1:1)
- “God, the only Son” (John 1:18)
- “My Lord and my God” (John 20:28)
- “the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever” (Rom. 9:5)
- “our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13)
- “of the Son, he says, ‘Your throne, O God’” (Heb. 1:8)
- “our God and Savior, Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 1:1)
- “Jesus Christ . . . is the true God” (1 John 5:20)

See Murray J. Harris, *Jesus as God: The New Testament Use of Theos in Reference to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1992).

4.10

What Does “Son of Man” Mean?

There has been much scholarly debate concerning the meaning of the phrase “son of man (humanity)” which is also written as “Son of Man” when it is used as a virtual title that Jesus applies to himself.

The phrase is used in the Old Testament (primarily the books of Psalms, Ezekiel, and Daniel) and is applied to Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels, usually in a context of self-reference: Jesus refers to himself as “the Son of Man,” but others do not generally refer to him this way. Paul and other letter writers do not use the phrase except when quoting Old Testament Scripture.

The *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary* has tried to sort out the confusion by indicating the phrase can be used with three meanings:

1. *As an idiomatic way of speaking of a human, or of humanity collectively.* The Hebrew phrase in question is *ben ’adam*, which the NRSV often translates as “mortal(s).” Sometimes, the phrase *ben ’adam* is used in synonymous parallelism with “human being,” as when the psalmist asks, “what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?” (Ps. 8:4); note that in Hebrew the word translated “mortals” is a singular expression (literally, “the son of man”), though it does seem to be used here in a collective sense (to refer to human in general). Likewise, in Psalm 80:17 the

reference to “the one whom you made strong” would be literally translated “the son of man whom you made strong.” In the book of Ezekiel, the prophet is repeatedly addressed by God or by an angelic messenger as “son of man” (NRSV: “mortal”; e.g., Ezek. 2:1, 6).

The point is probably to suggest the prophet’s humanity (weakness and finitude) as contrasted with the divine majesty. In Daniel 7:13, the meaning of the phrase, “one like a son of man” (NRSV: “one like a human being”) is disputed. It may mean (as the NRSV suggests) that the symbol for God’s faithful people is a human, whereas the symbols for the previous kingdoms described by Daniel were beasts and monsters. Some scholars, however, would interpret the phrase in this verse in line with 2 below.

2. *As an angelic, supernatural figure often associated with apocalyptic scenarios of judgment.* This sense of the phrase is clearly evident in some Hellenistic Jewish writings of the Second Temple period (e.g., *1 Enoch* 37–91; *2 Esd.* 13). The son of man figures as God’s agent of judgment and salvation. Many scholars would read the references to the coming of the son of man in Daniel in this light:

As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a human being [lit. “one like a son of man”] coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was

presented before him. To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed. (Dan. 7:13–14)

It is disputed, however, whether the angelic concept of “son of man” had developed before the New Testament period; if it had not, then the “son of man” reference here would be understood along the lines of 1 above.

3. *When spelled Son of Man (in the NRSV and other English Bibles), a title for Jesus employed especially in the Synoptic Gospels.* With one exception (Acts 7:56) and apart from the citation of Psalm 8:4 in Hebrews 2:6 (NRSV, “mortals”) and an allusion to Daniel 7:13 in Revelation 1:13, the term is used exclusively by Jesus in reference to himself. It is customary to classify the references in the Synoptic Gospels under three headings: (1) sayings in which Jesus refers to his present activity during his earthly ministry (e.g., Matt. 8:20; 11:19; Mark 2:10, 28; 10:45); (2) sayings in which Jesus refers to his impending passion and/or resurrection (Mark 8:31; 9:9, 31; 10:33; 10:45); and (3) sayings in which he refers to his future activity as Judge and Savior (e.g., Mark 8:38; cf. Luke 12:8; Mark 13:26; 14:62; Luke 17:22–30).

In John's Gospel, "Son of Man" as a self-referent for Jesus has a more varied usage, the most characteristic being those sayings that speak of the exaltation of the Son of Man, an expression that makes a double allusion to the cross and resurrection/ascension (John 3:14; 8:28; 12:34). John 1:51 looks like an original parousia saying (third category above) transferred to the present ministry (first category). John 6:53 speaks of eating the flesh and drinking the blood of the Son of Man and John 9:35 of believing in the Son of Man. Most interpreters would concur that some of the uses by Jesus were intended to identify him with the apocalyptic deliverer that had come to be associated with the "son of man" image in apocalyptic Jewish writings (and in the interpretation of Dan. 7:13–14 current in first-century-CE apocalyptic Jewish circles).

Article by Reginald Fuller, adapted by Mark Allan Powell, from *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*. rev. ed., ed. Mark Allan Powell (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 984.

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4.11

Jesus and Ethics

New Testament ethics is a major field of study on which numerous books have been written. The field often focuses particular attention on the ethical stances of two individuals: Jesus of Nazareth and the apostle Paul. Although there is more to the discussion (e.g., ethical positions of individual evangelists and of the authors of non-Pauline letters), the ethics of Jesus and Paul predominate.

Here is a “thumbnail sketch” of what is typically said regarding Jesus and ethics.

In preaching the advent of God’s kingdom, Jesus underscores both the possibility and the necessity of repentance (Mark 1:14–15). Thus future hope becomes a motivation for acting mercifully and responsibly in the present. At points it may seem that Jesus is thinking mostly about the future: he makes moral acts a strict requirement for admission to the kingdom (e.g., Mark 10:24–25; Matt. 25:31–46), threatens persons with the final judgment (Mark 9:42–48; 12:40; Matt. 5:22), and promises final rewards to those who act rightly (Mark 10:21; Matt. 6:19–21). It is clear, however, that one’s primary motivation for morality should be the desire to live in conformity to God’s standards, not simply to obtain eternal life or heavenly rewards (e.g., Matt. 5:45, 48).

According to the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus's view of the law of Moses was generally positive and, indeed, he often interpreted that law in terms that would intensify its demands (cf. his teachings on murder, adultery, divorce, oath taking, and retaliation in Matt. 5:21–42). Jesus's ethical interpretations of the law are grounded in a belief that the two-fold love commandment—“to love God and to love one's neighbor” (Mark 12:29–31; from Deut. 6:4–5 and Lev. 19:18)—expresses God's will in a fundamental, definitive sense. With this as the primary principle, Jesus proceeds to indicate concrete ways in which love should affect moral behavior: affirming marriage and discouraging divorce (Mark 10:2–9), using wealth to benefit the poor (Luke 19:8), caring for anyone in need (Luke 10:29–37), avoiding violence (Matt. 26:52), and living a life of service (Luke 22:26–27).

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4.12

References to Jesus in Non-Christian Literature

The New Testament is not the only book from antiquity that mentions Jesus.

Roman Literature

JOSEPHUS (37–100). In describing the illegal execution of James, the leader of the Christian church in Jerusalem, Josephus identifies James as “the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ” (*Jewish Antiquities* 20.9.1).

A second reference is more detailed, but there is a problem with it. We have no original manuscripts of Josephus’s work, and some of the ones that we do possess have been edited by later Christians who added their own description of Jesus to what the Jewish historian originally wrote. The following quotation brackets words that most scholars think were editorial additions:

At this time there appeared Jesus a wise man [if indeed one should call him a man]. For he was a doer of startling deeds, a teacher of people who receive the truth with pleasure. And he gained a following both among Jews and among many of Greek origin. [He was the Messiah.] And when Pilate, because of an accusation made by the leading men among us, condemned him to the cross, those who had loved him previously did not cease to do so. [For he appeared to them on the third day, living again,

just as the divine prophets had spoken of these and countless other wondrous things about him.] And up until this very day the tribe of Christians, named after him, has not died out. (*Jewish Antiquities* 18.3.3)

TACITUS (56–117). Tacitus records that Jesus was “executed in Tiberius’s reign by the governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate” (*Annals* 15.44).

SUETONIUS (69–135). Suetonius reports in a writing from around 120 that the emperor Claudius expelled Jews from Rome because of trouble arising over “Chrestus” (*Twelve Caesars* 25.4). Most scholars think this is a mangled spelling of the Latin for “Christ.”

MARA BAR SERAPION (late first century). Mara bar Serapion, a Syriac Stoic, wrote a letter to his son that does not mention Jesus by name but says that the Jews killed “their wise king” whose wisdom (like that of Socrates and Pythagoras) continues “because of the new laws he laid down.”

PLINY THE YOUNGER (ca. 61–113). Pliny writes about Christians in a letter to the emperor Trajan around 111–113. He comments that they “chant verses to Christ as to a god” (*Letter to Trajan* 10.96).

LUCIAN OF SAMOSATA (115–200). Lucian writes a mocking satire about Christians who are said to worship a “crucified sophist” from Palestine and to live “under his laws,” because he “introduced this new cult into the world” (*The Passing of Peregrinus* 11, 13).

Jewish Writings

Scholars debate whether there may be obscure references to Jesus in some of the collections of ancient Jewish writings, such as the Talmuds, the Tosefta, the Targums, and the midrashim. Occasional polemical comments in these writings are sometimes thought to be veiled references to Jesus, but since he is not mentioned by name, no one knows for sure. The text that is most often accepted as referring to Jesus comes from the Babylonian Talmud, and the materials that make up this work were collected over a long period of time, finally coming together around 500–600. Thus there is no way of knowing how early (or how reliable) the reference may be.

Nevertheless, here it is:

On the eve of Passover, they hanged Yeshu [= Jesus], and the herald went before him forty days saying, "(Yeshu) is going forth to be stoned, since he practiced sorcery and cheated and led his people astray. Let everyone knowing anything in his defense come and plead for him." But they found nothing in his defense and hanged him on the eve of Passover. (*b. Sanhedrin 43a*)

A little later, this same text also says, "Jesus had five disciples: Mattai, Maqai, Metser, Buni, and Todah."

4.13

The Enlightenment: Historical Skepticism and Religious Faith

The Enlightenment was an eighteenth-century movement in Western intellectual thought that established norms for understanding reality and defining what is or is not true.

“Enlightenment thinking” is characterized by a commitment to reason and an appeal to empirical observation. Enlightenment thinkers valued reason and observation over appeals to tradition or authority. They were not willing to accept a proposition as true or valid simply because it had the backing of political or religious authorities.

The Enlightenment introduced the modern notion of critical thinking. Truth claims became subject to scrutiny and appeals to tradition or authority ceased to be as persuasive for establishing such claims as “sound arguments” based on reason and/or empirical observation.

The Enlightenment encouraged disciplined scholarship that adhered to well-defined methods for testing and verifying hypotheses. This new orientation led to tremendous advances in science and mathematics, but it posed special problems for religion.

One lasting legacy of the Enlightenment for Western thought has been a distrust of assertions that cannot be verified. Accordingly, a challenge of the Enlightenment to Christianity has involved the

development of a historical method for evaluating what should properly be defined as “historical truth.”

First, the Enlightenment orientation distinguishes between potentially verifiable statements about historical events and speculative interpretations regarding the significance of those events:

- “Jesus died on a cross” claims to state a historical fact.
- “Jesus died for our sins” does not claim to state a historical fact.

The first claim belongs to the realm of history, and the second to the realm of speculative faith or religion. The first is potentially verifiable; the second is not. The first might be regarded as a fact; the second can be regarded only as an opinion.

Second, the Enlightenment orientation seeks for verification of statements about historical events according to criteria of historical research, apart from any appeal to tradition (“the church has always taught that this happened”) or authority (“the Bible says this happened”) or revelation (“God says this happened”):

- “Jesus taught in parables”: usually accepted as a verifiable historical fact
- “Jesus was born to a virgin”: usually not accepted as a verifiable historical fact

From the nineteenth century on, Christians would discover that (1) many of their faith claims had come to be regarded as merely

speculative opinions, and (2) many of their propositions about history (on which faith claims were often based) had come to be regarded as unverifiable tenets.

The challenge for modern Christians is to define their faith as true in a culture where the validity of opinions and assertions is not typically maintained through appeals to tradition, authority, or revelation.

4.14

Early “Lives of Jesus”: An Adventure in Scholarship

During the period following the Enlightenment, scholars embarked on what came to be called “the quest for the historical Jesus.” They wrote biographies known as “lives of Jesus.” These works typically imposed some grand scheme or hypothesis upon the biblical material in order to interpret everything in accord with a consistent paradigm (e.g., “Jesus was a social reformer” or “Jesus was a religious mystic”).

Hundreds of these “lives of Jesus” were produced during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. What follows here is a sampling of some of the most influential views.

HERMANN SAMUEL REIMARUS (1694–1768). Herman Reimarus believed that Jesus was an unsuccessful political claimant who saw it as his destiny to be established by God as king of the restored people of Israel. Reimarus was a respected professor of Eastern languages at the University of Hamburg, and his works on Jesus were not published until after his death. Apparently, he feared retribution for his controversial views during his lifetime.

In any case, fragments of a large unpublished manuscript were printed between 1774 and 1778, and these mark what many consider to be the beginning of the quest for the historical Jesus.

Reimarus interpreted all the passages in the New Testament where Jesus speaks of the “kingdom of God” or the “kingdom of heaven” as references to a new political reality about to be established on earth. Thus, Reimarus said, Jesus believed he was the Messiah (Christ), but he meant this in a worldly sense. Jesus thought that God was going to deliver the people of Israel from bondage to the Romans and create a new and powerful kingdom on earth where Jesus himself would rule as king. This is why he was charged with the crime of claiming to be the King of the Jews and executed (Matt. 27:37). When he died, he cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46) because he realized in his last moments that God had failed him and that his hopes had been misplaced.

His disciples, however, were unable to accept this outcome. Not wanting to return to their mundane lives in Galilee, they stole his body from its tomb, claimed he had been raised from the dead (see Matt. 28:11–15), and made up a new story about how Jesus had died willingly as an atonement for sins. The message of the kingdom was spiritualized, and the teaching of the failed religious fanatic was transformed into a religion promising salvation after death to those who joined an organization led by his followers.

HEINRICH EBERHARD GOTTLOB PAULUS (1761–1851). Heinrich Paulus was a veteran rationalist who became best known for offering naturalistic explanations for miracle stories reported in the Gospels. As professor of theology at the University of Heidelberg, he

published a two-volume work on the life of Jesus in 1828. Paulus accepted the miracle stories as reports of historical events but reasoned that a primitive knowledge of the laws of nature led people in biblical times to regard as supernatural occurrences what the advancement of knowledge has rendered understandable. For example, Jesus may have appeared to walk on water when he strode along the shore in a mist, and he may have received credit for stilling a storm when the weather coincidentally improved after he awoke from sleep on a boat trip. Jesus healed people by improving their psychological disposition or, sometimes, by applying medicines mixed with mud (John 9:6) or spit (Mark 8:23).

Likewise, Paulus said, Jesus's disciples were provided with medicinal oil to use for curing certain ailments (Mark 6:13). The story of the feeding of the five thousand recalls a time when Jesus and his disciples generously shared their own provisions with those who had none, inspiring others in the crowd to do the same until everyone was satisfied.

DAVID FRIEDRICH STRAUSS (1808–74). David Strauss appealed to modern understandings of mythology to steer a middle course between naive acceptance of Gospel stories and the sort of simplistic explanations for these stories offered by Paulus. In 1835, Strauss published *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, a two-volume work over fourteen hundred pages long. He called for unbiased historical research to be done on the Gospels, establishing

an orientation for scholarship that is still followed by many today. He discerned, for instance, that the stories in the first three Gospels are less developed than those in John, which, accordingly, is the least valuable book for historical reconstruction.

Still, Strauss regarded most of the stories in all the Gospels as myths, developed on the pattern of Old Testament prototypes. The point of such tales is not to record historical occurrences but rather to interpret historical events in light of various religious ideas. For example, the story of Jesus's baptism includes references to the Spirit descending as a dove upon Jesus and a voice speaking from heaven. These things did not actually happen in the strict historical sense, but they interpret the significance of something that did occur. Jesus really was baptized by John, and his sense of mission was somehow related to what he experienced on that occasion.

ERNST RENAN (1823–92). Ernst Renan combined critical scholarship with novelistic aesthetic appeal to create what was probably the most widely read life of Jesus in his day. The book, published in 1863, broke with rationalism in its attempt to discern the emotional impact of the Jesus tradition and to trace the reasons for this to the passions, individuality, and spontaneity of Jesus himself. Regarding the Gospels as “legendary biographies,” Renan sought to uncover the personality that inspired the legends while also displaying his own penchant for poetic, even sentimental, description. For example, since Jesus is said to have ridden into

Jerusalem on a mule (in modern Bibles, an ass or a donkey), Renan imagined that he typically traveled about the countryside seated on “that favorite riding-animal of the East, which is so docile and sure-footed and whose great dark eyes, shaded with long lashes, are full of gentleness.”¹

Renan also attempted to fit the Gospel materials into an overall chronology for the life of Jesus. He described the initial years as “a Galilean springtime,” a sunny period in which Jesus was an amiable carpenter who rode his gentle mule from town to town, sharing a “sweet theology of love” that he had discerned through observation of nature. Renan dismissed the literal historicity of miracles, suggesting that the raising of Lazarus was a “staged miracle,” a deliberate hoax designed to win acclaim for Jesus. In any case, Jesus eventually visited the capital city of Jerusalem, where his winsome message met with opposition from the rabbis. This led him to develop an increasingly revolutionary stance with a harsher tone, to despair of earthly ambitions, and at last to invite persecution and martyrdom.

Some Conclusions

What lessons are to be learned from these “lives of Jesus”?

Reimarus’s writings were overtly hostile to Christianity, while the other three authors viewed themselves as Christian theologians who sought to discover or salvage something in the biblical tradition that could be recognized as universally true. All four were skeptical of the

miracle stories, displaying a reluctance to accept anything that deals with the supernatural as a straightforward historical account. All questioned the accuracy of the Gospels at certain points and sought to supplement the stories with what they thought were reasonable conjectures at other points.

The most important lesson, however, was noted with verve by Albert Schweitzer in 1906. All of these authors (and numerous others) managed to produce portraits of Jesus that they personally found appealing. For the non-Christian, the historical Jesus rather conveniently turned out to be a fraud. And for the Christians, the historical Jesus seemed in every case to end up believing whatever the individual biographer believed and valuing things that the individual biographer valued. The so-called quest for the historical Jesus had tended in fact to become a quest for the relevant Jesus.

Adapted from Mark Allan Powell, *Jesus as a Figure in History: How Modern Historians View the Man from Galilee* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 13–16. Used by permission.

1. Quoted in Albert W. Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 161.

4.15

Quests for the Historical Jesus: Highlights in the History of the Discipline

Before the Twentieth Century (ca. 1750–1900)

Before what came to be called “the quest for the historical Jesus,” “the Jesus of history” was thought to be identical to “the Christ of faith.” The intellectual movement known as the Enlightenment initiated the historical quest. The Gospels came to be viewed not simply as Scripture but as historical sources.

H. S. Reimarus (1694–1768) wrote a four-thousand-page manuscript, published anonymously as the *Wolfenbüttel Fragments*. It was a rationalist reconstruction of early Christianity that presented Jesus as an unsuccessful political reformer; the disciples invented the story of the resurrection by stealing the body of Jesus. Reimarus hoped to create a rational (nonrevealed) Christianity.

D. F. Strauss (1808–74) observed the mythical dimension of the Gospels and assumed that, once it was stripped away, a defensible, rationalistic Jesus could be recovered. Strauss’s Jesus was a religious genius, an example for humanity.

The nineteenth century saw a spate of literary portraits of Jesus in which he was a great, noble teacher. These portraits of Jesus invariably were idealistic, romantic, and rationalistic.¹

First Half of the Twentieth Century (ca. 1900–1950)

Albert Schweitzer's (1875–1965) book *The Quest for the Historical Jesus* (1906) had an enormous impact. Schweitzer surveyed the nineteenth-century portraits of Jesus and determined that the authors inevitably portrayed Jesus as the figure that they personally wanted him to be. He also averred that the actual historical Jesus was a zealous, apocalyptic fanatic, lacking in relevance for our time.

Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976) reached the pessimistic conclusion that certain knowledge of Jesus was all but impossible, but he proposed that such knowledge was also theologically unnecessary. Christian faith could be based on the existential truth embedded in New Testament mythology rather than on literal truth that might have been presented in more historically reliable documents.

Christian interest in the historical Jesus waned during this period, though significant studies continued to be produced by scholars such as Alfred Loisy, Maurice Gogul, Charles Guignebert, Joachim Jeremias, C. H. Dodd, and many more.

The New Quest (ca. 1950–80)

Bultmann's students became convinced that their teacher had driven a wedge too deeply between "the Jesus of history" and "the Christ of faith." Some measure of continuity between the two was needed. Otherwise, Christianity would sink into Docetism and Jesus would become a phantom. Their work was sometimes called "the new

quest” to distinguish it from the “lives of Jesus” produced in the former era.

Ernst Käsemann (1906–98) wrote an essay in 1953 in which he parted ways with his teacher (Bultmann) and argued for greater continuity between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith.

Günther Bornkamm (1905–90) and Norman Perrin (1920–76) likewise published books on Jesus, which claimed it might be impossible to produce a biography of the man but that it was possible to make judgments regarding certain facts about him. Bornkamm and Perrin presented lists of “indisputable facts” regarding Jesus.

J. M. Robinson (1924–2016) wrote *The New Quest for the Historical Jesus* (1959). Robinson sought to demonstrate points of consistency between the Jesus who lived and the Jesus of Christian proclamation.

Features of the new quest include an awareness of the limits of historical reconstruction; a recognition that the Gospels are religiously biased; an insistence on the role of history in understanding Jesus’s significance.

Recent Studies (ca. 1980–present)

The last two decades of the twentieth century witnessed a revival of interest in the historical Jesus.

The Jesus Seminar was launched in 1985. A largely American group, these scholars held regular meetings to discuss the sayings and deeds of Jesus and to vote on their historical authenticity. They deemed about 20 percent of the sayings attributed to Jesus in the Gospels to be historically verifiable apart from any consideration of religious ideology. Numerous biographies of Jesus were produced by scholars such as Marcus Borg, John Dominic Crossan, John Meier, E. P. Sanders, and N. T. Wright.

Wright suggested that the work of some scholars (Meier, Sanders, and himself—but not the Jesus Seminar) should be called “the third quest” as a way to distinguish their work from both the former “lives of Jesus” and the skeptical “new quest” work done by Bultmann’s students. Characteristics of this so-called third quest would include a more accurate knowledge of first-century Judaism (and more emphasis on Jesus’s Jewish identity) and a more positive assessment of the Gospel traditions (chastened use of “the criterion of dissimilarity”).

People who did not understand that the term “third quest” was intended to refer to a particular type of historical Jesus studies sometimes thought the term was a label for a chronological period (e.g., all the studies associated with the widespread revival of interest in the late twentieth century). Thus some surveys speak of the “old quest,” the “new quest,” and the “third quest” as eras of scholarship.

Most scholars would eventually conclude that labels like “new quest” and “third quest” are inaccurate and subject to misinterpretation.

There is only one quest for the historical Jesus, which has continued unabated for centuries, albeit with different expressions and degrees of intensity.

1. See Mark Allan Powell, *Jesus as a Figure in History: How Modern Historians View the Man from Galilee* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998).

4.16

Criteria for Historical Criticism

How do historians decide which information about Jesus may be deemed “historically plausible” or “historically verifiable”? They typically use criteria such as these to evaluate the relative merit of material found in the New Testament and other ancient sources.

Multiple Attestation

Material is more likely to be deemed historically reliable if it correlates with the witness of other, independent sources.

- The proposal that “Jesus told parables” passes this criterion, since several different sources portray Jesus as telling parables.
- The proposal that “Jesus told the parable of the good Samaritan” does not pass this criterion, because we find this particular parable in only one source, the Gospel of Luke.

Memorable Form or Content

Material is more likely to be deemed historically reliable if it is couched in terms easy to remember (e.g., brief, humorous, paradoxical, or shocking).

- The report that Jesus told a man, “Let the dead bury the dead” (Luke 9:60) passes this criterion, because the saying is provocative and would have been easy to remember.
- The so-called High-Priestly prayer that Jesus is said to have prayed on the night of his arrest (John 17:1–26) does not pass this criterion, because it is long and rambling and would have been difficult for any bystander to have remembered.

Language and Environment

Material is more likely to be deemed historically reliable if it is compatible with the language and culture of the period it describes (rather than reflecting the language and culture for the time and place in which the source was written).

- The parable of the sower (Mark 4:3–8) passes this criterion, because it accurately reflects agricultural practices in rural Galilee that would not have been widely known elsewhere in the Roman Empire.
- The explanation that Jesus gives for this parable (Mark 4:13–20) does not pass this criterion, because it contains language that derives from the early church (“the word”) and compares what happens to the seed to the effects of Christian preaching.

Embarrassment

Material is likely to be deemed historically reliable if reporting the material would have been awkward for the church.

- Stories that portray tension between Jesus and his family members (e.g., Mark 3:21, 31–35) pass this criterion, because those family members came to be highly regarded in the early church, which would have had no incentive for recalling stories about their shortcomings.
- Stories that portray Jesus besting his Jewish opponents in debate (e.g., Mark 12:13–37) do not pass this criterion, since the early church was engaged in disputes with Judaism and no doubt found those stories to be particularly appealing.

Dissimilarity or Distinctiveness

Material is more likely to be deemed historically reliable if it does not support the particular interests of the author.

- The proposal that “Jesus was baptized by John” passes this criterion, because the report of this event does not appear to support any particular claim that the Gospel authors wish to make.
- The proposal that “Jesus commissioned his followers to make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:16–20) does not pass this criterion, because the author of the Gospel that portrays Jesus doing this was interested in motivating churches to evangelize gentiles.

Plausible Influence

Material is more likely to be deemed historically reliable if it explains Jesus's purported influence on early Christianity in ways that derive from Palestinian Judaism.

- The notion that Jesus spoke about “the Son of Man” passes this criterion, because early gentile Christians made much of that term but would not have been inclined to favor such a distinctively Jewish concept if it had not come to them as part of the inherited tradition.
- The idea that Jesus told people that knowing the truth would set them free (John 8:32) does not pass this criterion, because the early Christian church's concern with the liberating effects of knowledge owed more to Greek philosophy than to Jewish tradition.

Coherence

Material that cannot be established by the above criteria is more likely to be deemed historically reliable if it is consistent with the information that is so derived.

- A saying found in the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas passes this criterion, because it resembles genuine sayings of Jesus: “Whoever is near me is near the fire; whoever is far from me is far from the Kingdom” (Thomas 82; cf. Mark 9:49; 12:34).

- A saying that implores Jesus’s followers to regard an impenitent sinner “as a Gentile or a tax collector” (Matt.18:17) does not pass this criterion, because it does not cohere well with our knowledge that Jesus was accepting of gentiles and tax collectors.

Congruity with a Modern View of Reality

Material is more likely to be deemed historically reliable if it does not require acceptance of ideas that contradict modern views of reality.

- The proposal that Jesus earned fame as a popular teacher, even though he had no professional training, passes this criterion, because our modern world recognizes that untrained individuals can possess the inherent ability to become noteworthy teachers.
- The resurrection of Jesus would not pass this criterion, because modern science maintains that people who have been dead for three days do not come back to life.

Summary Chart: Criteria for Determining Historical

Reliability in Jesus Research

CRITERION	Passes this criterion	Does not pass this criterion
Multiple Attestation Material correlates with the witness of other, independent sources.	<i>Jesus told parables.</i> Several different sources portray Jesus as telling parables.	<i>Jesus told the parable of the good Samaritan.</i> This particular parable is in only one source (“L”).
Memorable Form or Content	<i>Jesus told a man, “Let the dead bury the dead”</i>	<i>The “High-Priestly prayer” that Jesus is said to have</i>

Material is couched in terms easy to remember (e.g., brief, humorous, paradoxical, or shocking).	(Luke 9:60). The saying is provocative and would have been easy to remember.	<i>prayed on the night of his arrest</i> (John 17:1–26). It is long and rambling and would have been difficult to remember.
Language and Environment Material is compatible with the language and culture of the period it describes (rather than reflecting the language and culture for the time and place in which the source was written).	<i>The parable of the sower</i> (Mark 4:3–8). Accurately reflects agricultural practices in rural Galilee that would not have been widely known elsewhere in the Roman empire	<i>Explanation of the parable of the sower</i> (Mark 4:13–20). Contains language that derives from the early church (“the word”) and compares what happens to the seed to the effects of Christian preaching
Embarrassment Material would have been awkward for the church to remember and report.	<i>Stories revealing tension between Jesus and his family members</i> (e.g., Mark 3:21, 31–35). The early church had no incentive for recalling stories about tensions within the family of Jesus.	<i>Stories in which Jesus bests his Jewish opponents in debate</i> (e.g., Mark 12:13–37). The early church was engaged in disputes with Judaism and no doubt found these stories appealing.
Dissimilarity or Distinctiveness Material does not support the particular interests of the author or the source.	<i>Jesus was baptized by John.</i> Report of this incident does not appear to support any particular claim that any Gospel author wishes to make.	<i>Jesus commissioned his followers to “make disciples of all nations”</i> (Matt. 28:16–20). The author of this Gospel was interested in evangelizing gentiles.
Plausible Influence Material reflects the enduring influence of Jesus by explaining how a matter rooted in Palestinian Judaism would become a prominent concern in gentile Christianity.	<i>Jesus spoke about the Son of Man.</i> Early gentile Christians made much of this term but would not have been inclined to favor such a distinctively Jewish concept on their own (i.e., unless Jesus had used it).	<i>Jesus told people that knowing the truth would set them free</i> (John 8:32). The early church’s concern with the liberating effects of knowledge owed more to Greek philosophy than to Jewish tradition.
Coherence Material that cannot be established by the above criteria is nevertheless consistent with information that is so derived.	<i>Jesus says in the Gospel of Thomas, “Whoever is near me is near the fire; whoever is far from me is far from the Kingdom”</i> (Thomas 82). This resembles sayings of Jesus found in more reliable sources (Mark 9:49; 12:34).	<i>Jesus implores his followers to regard an impenitent sinner “as a Gentile or a tax collector”</i> (Matt. 18:17). This does not cohere well with knowledge that Jesus was accepting of gentiles and tax collectors.
Congruity with Modern View of Reality Material does not require	<i>Jesus became a popular teacher though he lacked professional training.</i>	<i>Jesus was raised from the dead.</i> Modern science says

acceptance of ideas that contradict modern views of reality.	Such things are known to happen in our modern world.	people who are dead for three days do not come back to life.
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4.17

Modern Biographies of Jesus

Historians often attempt to write biographies of Jesus based on what they take to be plausible reconstructions of his life and teaching.

What follows here are a few summaries of key conclusions reached by some of the most prominent historical Jesus scholars regarding what they believe can be regarded as historically plausible.

Marcus Borg (1942–2015) saw Jesus as a Jewish mystic, a charismatic “Spirit person” who was intent on revitalizing Israel. Jesus claimed an intimacy with God and, throughout his life, experienced visions and other encounters with divine reality that he believed empowered him to accomplish the mission for which God had selected him. This mission involved initiating a religious movement that would prioritize compassion over concern for purity. Thus Jesus opposed the “politics of holiness” that categorized people in his day as “clean or unclean” or even as “Jew or gentile,” and this religious vision led him to be identified as a subversive social reformer. He focused on both personal and political transformation, emphasizing practices rather than beliefs and exemplifying faith through deep commitment and gentle certitude.¹

John Dominic Crossan (1934–) views Jesus as a radical peasant who rebelled against political and religious authorities by defying their conventions. Apparently influenced (either directly or indirectly)

by Cynic philosophy, Jesus taught a new wisdom through parables and aphorisms that pointed out the inherent inadequacies of usual ways of thinking. In conscious resistance to the economic and social tyranny of Roman-occupied Palestine, he proclaimed a vision of life oriented around God's radical justice and adopted a lifestyle intended to emulate this concept. He and his followers chose to live in poverty. Even after he had gained some renown, he performed exorcisms and healings without charge. In violation of accepted taboos, he sought to demonstrate a radical egalitarianism by openly engaging in table fellowship with misfits and outcasts.²

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (1938–) thinks that Jesus initiated a social movement that defied the hierarchical society into which he had been born in favor of a vision of inclusive wholeness. He attacked the patriarchal family system of his day by insisting that no one except God should be viewed with the authority given to a father. He sought to create a new community in which women and other basically disenfranchised people could be prominent. He denounced Jewish purity codes as preserving masculine dominance and stressed instead the wisdom tradition of Israel. Indeed, Jesus encouraged people to worship God as Sophia (the female figure portrayed in the Old Testament as a personification of divine wisdom). He thought of himself as the child or prophet of Sophia and so (in spite of being biologically male) presented himself to his followers as an incarnation of the female principle of God.³

Paula Fredriksen (1951–), a Jewish scholar of ancient Christianity, thinks that Jesus was a popular religious teacher from Galilee who, unfortunately, was acclaimed by masses of people in Jerusalem to be the Messiah when he visited that city. Fredriksen reasons that neither Jesus nor his disciples actually made such a claim, but the mere fact that the populace purported Jesus to be the Messiah led Pilate to crucify him in order to disprove that notion and dampen the crowd's enthusiasm. This, in Fredriksen's mind, explains why Pilate did not also condemn Jesus's disciples (who had been innocent of any insurgency).⁴

Richard Horsley (1939–) sees Jesus as standing in the classic tradition of Israelite prophets, which is to say that he must be understood as someone fundamentally concerned with the social and political circumstances of his day. Jesus was a Jewish peasant whose social environment was characterized by a “spiral of violence” involving poverty, oppression, protest, and revolt. His ministry may be understood as fomenting a social revolution on behalf of his fellow peasants. He was not “political” in the sense of seeking transformation from the “top down” (e.g., a change of leadership); rather, he sought to change society from the “bottom up.” His aim was to renew peasant society in a way that would respect the honored traditions of Israel.⁵

John Meier (1942–) describes Jesus as “a marginal Jew”—that is, a Jewish teacher who by circumstance and choice lived on the

margins of his own society, speaking and acting in ways that sometimes made him appear “obnoxious, dangerous, or suspicious to everyone.” He began life as the eldest son of an average peasant family, but as a young adult he abandoned his job as a woodworker and left his home to become a disciple of John the Baptist, who called people to repent in preparation for some sort of imminent divine intervention. Later, he began a public ministry of his own, preaching that God was coming to gather his scattered people and to rule them as their king. Jesus also became widely known as a miracle worker, and this allowed him to claim that, in some sense, God’s reign was already present. In light of this, he presented himself as an authoritative teacher of God’s will, giving his followers clear directives on how God, their king, wanted them to live.⁶

E. P. Sanders (1937–) presents Jesus as an eschatological prophet whose essential mission was to announce a great future event that was about to take place. God was going to intervene directly in history in a way that would involve the elimination of all evil and the dawning of a new age. His vision for this transformation was decidedly Jewish: his selection of twelve disciples was intended to represent the restoration of the twelve tribes of Israel, and his act of overturning tables in the temple court was a symbolic act presaging that God would raise up a new temple to replace the corrupt one. The most radical aspect of Jesus’s vision was that he promised inclusion in God’s kingdom to sinners without demanding their repentance. He emphasized forgiveness, presenting God as loving

and gracious. His vision for the immediate dawn of God's kingdom turned out to be wrong, and his followers had to reinterpret his message in spiritual terms. This also made the message more appealing to non-Jews.⁷

Geza Vermes (1924–2013), who was a Jewish historian, drew connections between Jesus and other pious, charismatic Jews who were reputed to be miracle workers. Two such persons are especially significant because, according to the Talmud, they operated in first-century Galilee: Honi the Circle Drawer and Hanina ben Dosa. Vermes called Jesus a “hasid,” a type of holy man who, like Honi and Hanina, claimed to draw on the power of God in ways that transcended the usual channels of religious authority. Such persons were heirs of the Israelite prophetic tradition, especially as represented by Elijah and Elisha.⁸

Ben Witherington III (1951–) proposes that Jesus be understood as a Jewish sage who drew heavily on the wisdom traditions of Israel and taught a way of life consonant with the will of God as revealed through nature and commonsense observations about life. Jesus did not speak primarily as a prophet (using the classic “Thus says the Lord” formula), but instead tended to speak on his own authority, as do the authors of wisdom books such as Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. The form of his speech, furthermore, was not oracles but rather riddles, parables, aphorisms, and beatitudes. Ultimately, he appears to have understood himself to be the personification of divine

wisdom (Matt. 11:19, 25–27): he believed that he was the wisdom of God descended to earth in human form, and as such, he claimed to be “the revealer of the very mind of God.”⁹

N. T. Wright (1948–) describes Jesus as one who believed that his vocation was to enact what Scripture said God would do. Viewing himself as both prophet and Messiah, he understood his own destiny as symbolizing that of Israel. Thus he performed mighty works intended to signal the fulfillment of prophecy, and he sought to create a community of followers that would represent reconstituted Israel. Eventually, he came to believe that his vocation included dying as the representative of Israel. His death, he thought, would be a way to symbolically undergo the judgment that he had announced for Israel, and it would also serve as a prelude to his own vindication by God. This vindication (his resurrection) would initiate a new covenant with Israel and inaugurate God’s reign as king of the world. In ways like these, Jesus attempted to do and to be what Scripture said God alone could do and be.¹⁰

Where They Agree and Disagree

As these brief sketches reveal, historians disagree on various aspects of how the “historical Jesus” should be construed. There are many matters on which they completely agree (he was Jewish, he taught in parables, he befriended outcasts, he argued with Pharisees, he was crucified, etc.). But there are also disputed topics.

Jewish Orientation

The diversity of first-century Judaism allows various analogies for understanding Jesus: prophet, sage, rabbi, mystic, social reformer. Different historians attempt to understand Jesus in light of these different models; a few historical scholars even move away from Jewish categories altogether, arguing that Jesus was sufficiently Hellenized to be viewed as a generic philosopher.

Political Orientation

Most scholars think that Jesus's concern for justice was more a religious matter than a political one. But others see Jesus as a social revolutionary who challenged the existing order and advocated alternative political agendas and processes.

Vision for the Future

Some scholars say that Jesus announced the imminent end of the world, and he was proven wrong when this did not occur. Others think that Jesus spoke only of some radical transformation of Israel, and this did come about through the destruction of Jerusalem and the growth of the Christian church. A few scholars reject the notion that Jesus had any developed view of the future, assuming that his focus was decidedly on matters of the here and now.

Self-Consciousness

Some scholars believe that Jesus claimed to be the Messiah and may even have identified himself as a unique mediator or embodiment of divine presence. Others think that he probably

considered himself to be a prophet or divinely chosen teacher but probably did not interpret his role as unique or unprecedented in the history of Israel. Some historians think that Jesus eschewed all honorary titles for himself and that such descriptions came to be applied to him only later.

1. See Marcus J. Borg, *Jesus: A New Vision. Spirit, Culture, and the Life of Discipleship* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987); *Jesus: Uncovering the Life, Teachings, and Relevance of a Religious Revolutionary* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006).
2. See John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Peasant* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991); *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994).
3. See Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983); *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet: Critical Issues in Feminist Christology* (London: SCM, 1994).
4. See Paula Fredriksen, *Jesus of Nazareth: King of the Jews* (New York: Random House, 1999).
5. See Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002); *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence: Popular Jewish Resistance in Roman Palestine* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987); *Sociology and the Jesus Movement* (New York: Crossroad, 1989).
6. See John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, 4 vols., ABRL (New York: Doubleday, 1991–2009).
7. See E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985); *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (London: Penguin, 1993).

8. See Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew: A Historian's Reading of the Gospels* (London: Collins, 1973); *The Real Jesus: Then and Now* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010).

9. See Ben Witherington III, *The Christology of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990); *Jesus the Sage: The Pilgrimage of Wisdom* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994).

10. See N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God 2 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996).

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4.18

A Historian's Biography of Jesus: An Excerpt

(Box 4.3)

He comes as yet unknown into a hamlet of Lower Galilee. He is watched by the cold, hard eyes of peasants living long enough at subsistence level to know exactly where the line is drawn between poverty and destitution. He looks like a beggar, yet his eyes lack the proper cringe, his voice the proper whine, his walk the proper shuffle. He speaks about the rule of God, and they listen as much from curiosity as anything else. They know all about rule and power, about kingdom and empire, but they know it in terms of tax and debt, malnutrition and sickness, agrarian oppression and demonic possession. What, they really want to know, can this kingdom of God do for a lame child, a blind parent, a demented soul screaming its tortured isolation among the graves that mark the edges of the village? Jesus walks with them to the tombs, and, in the silence after the exorcism, the villagers listen once more, but now with curiosity giving way to cupidity, fear, and embarrassment. He is invited, as honor demands, to the home of the village leader. He goes, instead, to stay in the home of a dispossessed woman. Not quite proper, to be sure, but it would be unwise to censure an exorcist, to criticize a magician.

John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), xi.

4.19

Did Jesus Exist?

The great majority of Jesus historians have one thing in common: they believe that there actually was a historical person behind all the stories and teachings attributed to Jesus of Nazareth in the Bible (and other documents). Even if they question the accuracy of some (or most) of those accounts, even if they believe the historical reality of Jesus to have been quite different than what Christian faith would make of him, they at least believe that there was a historical reality.

Not everyone believes this. Around the edges of historical Jesus scholarship there have always been a few individuals who question the basic premise that Jesus existed¹ and that position continues to have its advocates today.² These people are not taken very seriously within the guild of historians; their work is usually dismissed as pseudo-scholarship that is dependent upon elaborate conspiracy theories and rather obviously motivated by anti-Christian polemic.³ Indeed, many of the people who espouse the “Jesus never existed” thesis (e.g., on various websites) are not scholars in the traditional sense; they are self-taught amateurs who sometimes seem unaware of any critical, academic approach to evaluating the historicity of Jesus traditions. They often seem to assume that the only alternative to denying the historical existence of Jesus would be to accept everything the Bible reports about him as straightforward historical fact.⁴ But “many” is not all—there have been scholars who have

questioned the historical existence of Jesus in ways that merit some mention in a review of historical Jesus scholarship.

The first major representative of this view to gain a hearing among biblical scholars was Bruno Bauer, a respected New Testament scholar of the nineteenth century.⁵ Bauer began his work with critical examination of the Gospels and became convinced that they were all written by individuals intent on promoting particular theological agendas (as opposed to simply reporting facts). Eventually, he decided that the author of Mark's Gospel had created much of the story of Jesus and that the other authors had simply adapted his work (a position not too dissimilar from that of Burton Mack). But, then, in his later years, he moved into a realm of conjecture that, according to Albert Schweitzer, no longer evinced "any pretense of following a historical method."⁶ He decided that the religion of Christianity had been invented by Seneca, Nero's tutor, who drew upon Philo of Alexandria. The letters of Paul were all forgeries, produced in the second century and backdated to give the impression that the Christian faith had originated earlier and that it had connections to Palestine. In fact, the Christian religion was a purely pagan faith, created in Rome, and Jesus was simply a mythical figure to whom philosophical ideas and remarkable events were attributed to connect the new faith with Judaism and give it a semblance of ancestry.

In 1910 a German philosophy professor named Arthur Drews published an influential book that presented a different version of what has come to be called “the Jesus myth theory” (i.e., the theory that Jesus did not exist as a historical person).⁷ Drews suggested that the Christian religion was based on Persian mythology and that the figure of Jesus was based on an Ephraimite solar deity. Unlike most proponents of the Jesus myth theory, however, Drews did not want to attack Christianity but wanted to rehabilitate it. He claimed it was Christ as an idea, not as a historical person, that held vitality for modern humanity—a new Christian reformation would involve faith in the idea embodied by the mythical figure of Christ rather than faith dependent upon historical claims about a person who never actually existed. Some of Drews’ ideas have been taken up in the modern era by Earl Doherty, who claims that Christians originally envisioned Jesus as a heavenly figure who appeared to them through visions and who suffered a sacrificial death in the heavenly realm in a manner modeled on the death of Purusha in the *Rig Veda* (a Sanskrit collection of hymns sacred to Hinduism).⁸

Peter Jensen, a German Assyriologist, also sought the origin of Christianity in myth rather than history, but he espoused the distinctive thesis that the Jesus story was a retelling of the Babylonian Gilgamesh epic and that Christians, in effect, worship a Babylonian deity.⁹ Notably, Jensen did not think it necessary to deny the existence of a historical Jew named Jesus entirely—he merely argued that everything we possess concerning such a person has

been so thoroughly transformed that nothing can be known of the man behind the myth. Such a position exemplifies a slight variation on the dominant Jesus myth theory. The usual claim is “Jesus did not exist”; the alternative version says, “Even if Jesus did exist, nothing historical can be affirmed regarding him.”

Those who hold to this latter, softer version of the thesis do not feel compelled to dismiss every possible reference to Jesus in all first-century writings; they grant that there could be some vague recollection that, for some unknown reason, a man named Jesus became the catalyst for the mythological speculation and/or visionary experiences out of which Christian religion evolved.

In the modern era, G. A. Wells, who prominently denied the existence of Jesus for many years, softened his thesis in later writings: he decided that the Q source probably did exist and that this fact alone indicates there probably was a historical man named Jesus who said things it would have contained—but the bottom line remains that historians can know next to nothing about this person.¹⁰

The most articulate modern proponent of the Jesus myth theory is Robert M. Price, a respected biblical scholar with two doctorates from Drew University.¹¹ He maintains that, in his critical work as a mainstream scholar, he was surprised to discover how difficult it was to poke holes in what he had once regarded as “extreme, even crackpot, theories.”¹² And, once convinced that those theories (denying the existence of Jesus) were probably correct, he felt no

need to abandon his faith: “I rejoice to take the Eucharist every week and to sing the great hymns of the faith. For me, the Christ of faith has all the more importance since I think it most probable that there was never any other.”¹³ He bases this conclusion on a number of considerations, including: (a) the absence of historical analogy for much of what is claimed regarding Jesus; (b) the lack of attention to Jesus in secular sources; (c) the lack of clear historical references to Jesus in the New Testament epistles;¹⁴ (d) the fact that everything in the Gospels can be read as serving the interests of the developing Christian church;¹⁵ and, (e) the strong possibility that many stories of Jesus in the Gospels were developed as midrash on Old Testament passages and/or as Christianized versions of myths current in various Middle Eastern religions.¹⁶

In sum, the Jesus myth theory has taken somewhat different forms¹⁷ and has been expressed in various ways and in service of different ends. Most advocates, however, deny that there are any early references to Jesus outside of the Gospels. The references in Roman writings are dismissed as Christian interpolations. References in the writings of Paul are also viewed as later interpolations or construed in such a way that Paul is talking about Jesus as only a concept or as a mythical or literary figure rather than a historical one. Thus the concept of Jesus as an actual historical person can be attributed to a single Gospel author (usually the author of Mark’s Gospel) from whom the others copied, and various motives for the innovation of presenting Jesus as an actual historical

person may be proposed: a devious motive may allege that the Gospel author had something to gain by deceiving people into believing historical falsehood; a more benign motive might suggest the author simply misunderstood an allegory or mythical tale and, so, innocently transformed fiction into biography; or that the Gospel writer/s intended his/their work to be read as allegory or myth but that it was misinterpreted as biography by later readers.

As indicated, the Jesus myth theory is not taken seriously by most historical scholars. Robert Price has gained something of a hearing because he presents his argument in a knowledgeable and nuanced manner, but historians have not found the argument persuasive.¹⁸ Dunn notes the intrinsic “improbability of the total invention of a figure who had purportedly lived within the generation of the inventors”¹⁹ and Bock wonders why there would have been no challenge to Christianity from Jewish opponents if the actual existence of Jesus was a matter open to debate.²⁰ Crossan thinks that the earliest layers of the Jesus tradition often present a figure very different from the apocalyptic image central to Christian religion: if Christians had invented a historical figure for their faith, they would not have come up with two such divergent versions of that figure. Johnson points out that Old Testament texts offer no precedent for the New Testament’s specific and nearly unanimous presentation of Jesus as a suffering and dying Messiah,²¹ and Crossan indicates that pagan mythology provides no parallel for the resurrection of a hero that was not considered to be unique but instead the first fruit of

an imminent general resurrection.²² Further, most historical scholars (Christian or not) find the attempt to explain away all apparent references to Jesus in Roman writings, much less New Testament epistles, to be an unconvincing tour de force that lapses into special pleading.²³

Adapted from Mark Allan Powell, *Jesus as a Figure in History: How Modern Historians View the Man from Galilee*. 2nd ed. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2013), 251–54.

1. On proponents of this thesis up to the early twentieth century, see Shirley Jackson Case, *The Historicity of Jesus* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1912); Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of the Progress from Reimarus to Wrede*, trans. W. B. D. Montgomery (1906; repr., New York: Macmillan, 1968), 124–42, 355–436.
2. See Bart Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2012) and Brent Landau, “‘Jesus Never Existed’: An Intellectual History of the ‘Jesus Myth’ Theory” (lecture, Historical Jesus Section, AAR/SBL annual meeting, San Francisco, November 2011).
3. An oft-quoted comment from Rudolf Bultmann would be typical: “Of course, the doubt as to whether Jesus really existed is unfounded and not worth refutation. No sane person can doubt that Jesus stands as founder behind the historical movement” (*Jesus and the Word* [New York: Scribner, 1958], 13). Bultmann himself rejected the historicity of much (probably most) of what the Gospels report concerning Jesus, yet he thought “no sane person” could doubt the basic fact of Jesus’s historical existence.
4. Robert Price, a proponent of the thesis that Jesus probably did not exist, notes that for some who hold this view, the options seem to be that there was a real superman or only a mythic superman; little consideration is given to alternative possibilities. See Robert M. Price, “Jesus at the Vanishing Point,” in *Historical*

Jesus: Five Views, ed. James K. Beilby and Paul Rhodes Eddy (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 55–104.

5. Bruno Bauer's books, including *Christianity Exposed* (1843) and *Christ and the Caesars: How Christianity Originated from Graeco-Roman Civilization* (1877), are rarely available in English. Summaries of his work can be found in Schweitzer, *Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 124–42, and in Case, *The Historicity of Jesus*, 32–132.

6. Schweitzer, *Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 140.

7. See Arthur Drews, *The Christ Myth*, 3rd ed., trans. C. DeLisle Burns (1910; repr., Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 1998).

8. Earl Doherty, *The Jesus Puzzle: Did Christianity Begin with a Mythical Christ?* (Ottawa: Canadian Humanist Publications, 1999); ten years later, Doherty self-published an 814-page updated version of this book titled *Jesus: Neither God Nor Man* (n.p.: Age of Reason Publications, 2009).

9. Peter Jensen, *Das Gilgamesch-Epos in der Weltliteratur* (Strassburg: Verlag von Karl J. Trübner, 1906), <https://archive.org/details/dasgilgameschepo01jensuoft>. Jensen also claimed that Abraham and Moses were figures derived from this epic (such that Jews also worship a Babylonian deity). His work was representative of a now-discredited view of history called “panbabylonianism.”

10. See G. A. Wells, *The Jesus Legend* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1996); Wells, *The Jesus Myth* (Chicago: Open Court, 1999).

11. See Price, “Jesus at the Vanishing Point.” For a more in-depth presentation, see Robert Price, *Deconstructing Jesus* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2000); *The Incredible Shrinking Son of Man: How Reliable Is the Gospel Tradition?* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2003); *Jesus Is Dead* (Cranford, NJ: American Atheist Press, 2007).

12. Price, “Jesus at the Vanishing Point,” 55.

13. Price, “Jesus at the Vanishing Point,” 56.

14. Price dismisses the significance of those epistolary passages that most scholars do think refer to Jesus as a historical person. E.g., Paul's reference to James as "the brother of the Lord" (Gal. 1:19) could simply mean that James was part of a spiritual brotherhood who felt a close kinship with their spiritual Lord; Paul's references to Jesus instituting the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:23–26) could be a later interpolation into that letter, or could simply be Paul's account of something he saw in a vision (in which case, the text would evidence the beginning of the historicization of the Christ figure). See Price, "Jesus at the Vanishing Point," 63–66.

15. Price takes the "criterion of dissimilarity" to its logical extreme: since "every single Gospel bit and piece must have had a home in the early church . . . all must be denied to Jesus by the criterion of dissimilarity" (Price, "Jesus at the Vanishing Point," 60; emphasis in original).

16. E.g., Mark 6:7–13 (Jesus's mission charge to his disciples) could be modeled on passages from the Elisha stories (2 Kings 4:29; 5:22), and the passion/resurrection narratives may be based on myths regarding Baal, Osiris, and other dying and rising gods. See further Robert M. Price, "New Testament Narrative as Old Testament Midrash," in *Encyclopedia of Midrash: Biblical Interpretation in Formative Judaism*, ed. Jacob Neusner and Alan J. Avery Peck (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 1:534–73; Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, *The Riddle of Resurrection: "Dying and Rising Gods" in the Ancient Near East*, Coniectanea Biblica Old Testament Series 50 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2001).

17. G. R. S. Mead and Alvar Ellegar suggest that Jesus did exist, but much earlier than is traditionally thought (thus the Christian myth focuses on a man who lived around 100 BCE). See G. R. S. Mead, *Did Jesus Live 100 BC?* (London: Theosophical Society, 1903), http://gnosis.org/library/grs-mead/jesus_live_100/index.htm; Alvar Ellegar, *Jesus One Hundred Years before Christ: A Study in Creative Mythology* (London: Century, 1999). G. A. Wells expressed a similar view in his early work; see Wells, *Jesus of the Early Christians: A Study in Christian Origins* (London: Pemberton, 1971); *Who Was Jesus?* (London: Pemberton, 1975); *The Historical Evidence for Jesus* (Amherst, NY:

Prometheus, 1988); *Who Was Jesus? A Critique of the New Testament Record* (LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1989).

18. James D. G. Dunn says that if Price's position represents "a true expression of the state of the health of the Jesus-myth thesis, I can't see much life in it." See Dunn, "Response to Robert M. Price," in Beilby and Eddy, eds., *Historical Jesus: Five Views*, 94–98. A more detailed and respectful rebuttal of Price, Wells, Doherty, and others associated with the Jesus myth theory is found in Paul Rhodes Eddy and Gregory A. Boyd, *The Jesus Legend: A Case for the Historical Reliability of the Synoptic Jesus Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007).

19. Dunn, "Response to Robert M. Price," 95.

20. Darrell L. Bock, "Response to Robert M. Price," in Beilby and Eddy, eds., *Historical Jesus: Five Views*, 100–103.

21. Luke Timothy Johnson, "Response to Robert M. Price," in Beilby and Eddy, eds., *Historical Jesus: Five Views*, 91.

22. Crossan, "Response to Robert M. Price," in Beilby and Eddy, eds., *Historical Jesus: Five Views*, 85. Eddy and Boyd question the basic thesis that the Jesus story was influenced by pagan mythology in *Jesus Legend*, 91–164.

23. Dunn says that at this point he displays "a readiness to offer less plausible hypotheses to explain data that inconveniences his thesis" ("Response to Robert M. Price," 96). Compare Bock, "Response to Robert M. Price," 101–102; Johnson, "Response to Robert M. Price," 92. For a more detailed rebuttal of this essential plank of the Jesus myth theory, see Eddy and Boyd, *Jesus Legend*, 165–236.

4.20

Historical Jesus Studies and Christian Apologetics

The field of historical Jesus studies is by definition a secular discipline (i.e., a science that assumes no presuppositions of faith). Still, numerous Christians have been and remain involved in the field. Accordingly, the question often arises as to how Christian scholars can contribute productively to a quest that demands respect for tenets at variance with the convictions of their faith (e.g., that the historical reliability of what is reported in biblical writings must be determined through careful analysis rather than affirmed by an appeal to the authoritative status of those writings as divinely inspired scripture).

Different Christians, of course, respond to this challenge in different ways.¹ There are many Christian scholars who have no problem discovering or even proposing that the canonical, biblical portrait of Jesus is a theological construct that may have been inspired by the historical reality but that can also be distinguished from it. Even conservative Christian scholars like John Meier have no problem admitting that the historical Jesus did not actually say or do everything attributed to him in the biblical documents. Scot McKnight, a conservative evangelical who has written extensively on the historical Jesus, allows that certain passages presented as the

words of Jesus in our Bibles are actually interpretative glosses supplied by the Christian evangelists.² Other Christian scholars, like Ben Witherington III, try to maintain a distinction between assessing “what happened” and “what is verifiable.” It is then possible for a devout Christian to believe (as a matter of religious faith) that Jesus did or said what the Bible says he did or said while simultaneously admitting (as a historical scholar) that many things the Bible says about Jesus cannot be verified historically. The Christian historian may regard many things about Jesus as authentic or true on the basis of scriptural authority while maintaining that these things cannot be regarded as authentic or true from the perspective of secular, historical science.³

The field of Christian apologetics takes a different tack. Christian engaged in apologetics often try to establish or prove the legitimacy of what they believe to be true on grounds that do not require blatant acceptance of biblical or ecclesial authority. Frequently, the apologists themselves believe the matters to be true primarily on faith, as a result of accepting authoritative biblical or ecclesial testimony, but they seek to find non-faith-based arguments that also establish, confirm, or otherwise support the veracity of what they believe. The motivation may be simply to support faith claims in a supplementary fashion, or it may be to prompt those who are not willing to accept the matters on faith to nevertheless consider the matters more seriously than they would otherwise. Frequently, as the word “apologetics” implies, the motivation is to defend faith claims

from secular challenges: if some historians are claiming Jesus did not actually do what the Bible says he did, an apologist might attempt to challenge those claims on historical grounds in order to insure the faithful that their beliefs are not actually contradicted by historical evidence. In a sense, then, apologists often try to bridge the gap between faith and science or history, so that “faith” will not be reduced to stubborn insistence on the veracity of beliefs that science or history claim to be demonstrably false.

As might be expected, Christian apologetics has an uneasy relationship with historical Jesus studies. On the one hand, many apologists are brilliant, well-informed scholars who construct sensible and persuasive arguments for why biblical testimony on specific matters (as well as in a more general sense) should be accepted as reliable and historically accurate. Any honest scholar who wants to discover the historical truth about Jesus will want to give those arguments the consideration they merit. On the other hand, the involvement of apologists in historical Jesus studies always seems one-sided. Most historical scholars find it frustrating to listen with an open mind to the arguments an apologist wants to offer in favor of historicity when they know that the apologist is not willing to listen with an open mind to any arguments that can be offered against historicity.

Historical Jesus scholars usually conceive of the task to which they are committed as a quest rather than as a debate. In a quest, one

searches for the truth with an open mind, marked by a willingness to follow the evidence wherever it leads, to revise one's views or even recant one's former positions when a better argument or better evidence is found. Most historical Jesus scholars would say they engage in conversation with people who disagree with them in order to discover if those people might in fact be right—or at least partly right. In a quest, there is always a very real possibility of having one's own thinking supplemented, altered, or even completely changed by the insights of those one initially thought were wrong. In a debate, by contrast, participants try to score points for their position and find ways to discredit the opposing position. A debate is enacted for the benefit of an audience, who will decide which side won and which side lost. No one expects either participant in the debate to be convinced by the arguments offered by their opponent.⁴

Historical Jesus studies is best construed as a quest, not a debate.⁵ Apologists, almost by definition, are committed to convincing people that their position (in favor of historicity) is correct, rather than to determining whether or not their proposal (regarding a possibility of historicity) might be correct—faith convictions typically disqualify any potential for a negative conclusion, or at least render such a conclusion remote, something the apologist would resist for reasons unrelated to the persuasiveness of evidence or argumentation.

There is, of course, nothing wrong with this: apologists can and do pursue their vocation with integrity, and debates between persons who hold intractable views can be both interesting and informative.⁶

But when apologists try to engage in historical Jesus studies—or when they present themselves as historical Jesus scholars—they often discover that they are not completely welcome. The reason is that they come to a quest prepared for a debate; the result is that they are politely tolerated, at best. To be frank, when apologists enter the fray of historical Jesus studies, they tend to be regarded as intruders, or simply as posers—they may have *something* to contribute, but they don't seem to get what everyone else is actually trying to do (or else, many suspect, they just don't care).⁷

The situation is confused when Christian scholars are *suspected of* engaging in apologetics regardless of their actual intent.⁸ Such suspicion may be furthered by the fact that some Christian scholars are willing to engage in both disciplines: apologetics *and* historical Jesus studies. They may approach the latter with a conservative bias but a general willingness to abide by “the rules of the game,” recognizing a distinction between what can be verified and what cannot. Unfortunately, such scholars do not always get the attention they might otherwise deserve simply because their commitment to apologetics is well known. They become stereotyped as intruders or posers when such labels might not actually apply.

We may note two prominent evangelical scholars who exemplify this sort of marginalization: Darrell Bock⁹ and Craig Keener.¹⁰ Both Bock and Keener have published massive works on the historical Jesus and on the field of historical Jesus studies. This is because, while

their work has been enthusiastically received in evangelical circles, it has not had a great impact on the field of historical Jesus studies overall. Some might suppose the guild operates with a bias against evangelical or conservative Christianity in general, but the relative inattention to Bock and Keener's work could also be due to the (possibly unfounded) suspicion that these scholars are more interested in apologetics (establishing historicity) than in embarking on an open-minded quest for historical truth.¹¹

Darrell Bock has sketched a portrait of the historical Jesus analogous to the major biographies of Jesus presented by other scholars.¹² Jesus was baptized by John and, in so doing, identified himself with John's mission of national renewal and repentance. In his own ministry, however, he announced the coming of God's kingdom, a newly dawning age of shalom that was already present in Jesus's own activity but would be consummated in a powerful and all-encompassing way. As he proclaimed this message, Jesus became noted for a number of things that were unique or at least distinctive: reaching out to the unclean and to others on the fringe of society; demanding that his followers exhibit intense commitment and total loyalty to the kingdom and to his own person; performing unusual works that he claimed exhibited divine power and exemplified God's benevolent care; advocating a lifestyle reflective of trust in divine provision; encouraging a radical love for enemies and willingness to forgive others their sin; and promising that, in the new covenant he was inaugurating, God would give people new

hearts so that they could be transformed and sustained through the power of the Spirit. Jesus also claimed in some sense to be the Messiah, though he tried to refine that term away from traditional political expectations. He entered Jerusalem, enacted a symbolic prophetic action against the religious authorities in the very courts of the temple they controlled, and shared a meal with his followers that conveyed a conviction that his own suffering would inaugurate the new covenant of which he had been speaking. When he was arrested and examined by Jewish authorities, he was pressed specifically on the question of his own identity and subsequently charged with blasphemy—that is, with claiming “an equality with God that the leadership would have judged as a slander against God’s unique glory.”¹³ He was then condemned by Pilate, who also believed he had made unwarranted claims regarding his own authority. He was crucified and his dead body placed in a tomb; subsequent claims that he had been raised from the dead gain credibility from the fact that they were framed in ways that the church would not have invented.

Bock lays out this portrait of Jesus with careful attention to typical methods for historical inquiry.¹⁴ He seeks to establish the probable historicity of every assertion he makes through appeals to multiple attestation, dissimilarity, and other accepted criteria, and he strives to interpret Jesus’s actions within a context of Second Temple Judaism informed by knowledge of archaeology, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and other available resources. In all these ways, his work

resembles that of many scholars. What seems distinctive is a tendency only to affirm, but never to deny, the historical reliability of biblical testimony. Thus Luke Timothy Johnson (another conservative Christian scholar) says that Bock's work would gain credibility if "at any point he entertained the possibility of some passage of the Gospels not yielding real historical knowledge."¹⁵ To be fair, Bock does follow convention by relying primarily on texts from Mark and Q, passages considered to have the greatest potential for historical reliability; there are texts (including most of John) that he simply doesn't consider. Still, he manages to avoid deciding that any passage he *does* consider presents material that should not be regarded as historically reliable (or even verifiable). Since Bock is known to be a strong proponent of biblical inerrancy, his historical Jesus work is sometimes suspected of being an exercise in apologetics: an effort to affirm whatever he thinks can be affirmed and to ignore anything that cannot be.¹⁶ Robert Price calls his work "opportunistic";¹⁷ Johnson suggests that he "has not yet grasped what historical analysis requires."¹⁸

In one of the most caustic critiques of Bock's work to date, Robert Miller alleges that Bock (and evangelicals like him) "use traditional historical-Jesus criteria to further their project of authenticating the Gospels" but "do not allow those same criteria to lead to negative historical conclusions."¹⁹ Indeed, Miller says evangelicals like Bock belong to a different "camp" than most historical Jesus scholars and that there can be no real dialogue or productive discussion between

those camps (due to their very different presuppositions and understanding of the task at hand). Other scholars, however—including people as ideologically diverse as John Dominic Crossan and James D. G. Dunn—have engaged Bock's work and reflected appreciatively on portions of it.²⁰

Craig Keener has written extensively on the historical reliability of the New Testament Gospels²¹ and on the credibility of the miracle stories that they report.²² He maintains that the Gospels belong to the genre of ancient historiography and that a comprehensive survey of contemporaneous works in this genre reveals a careful concern for accuracy. Obviously, ancient biographers and historiographers had their biases, and they sometimes got things wrong, but they did not just make things up in the cavalier fashion assumed by some historical Jesus scholars (e.g., Mack, Crossan). Scholars should start with the premise that the author is reporting historical fact unless there is an obvious reason to think otherwise; this, Keener maintains, is how scholars typically use other ancient works of historiography. Furthermore, the Gospel authors relied on early written sources and oral tradition (Luke 1:1–4), both of which provide eyewitness testimony; Jesus's disciples probably took notes and committed large portions of his teaching to memory, as was typical for disciples of other rabbis and for followers of other prominent figures of the day.²³ Even the reports of miracles should be read as accurate, straightforward historical accounts since those who are not encumbered by a scientifically and philosophically indefensible

antisupernaturalism are able to recognize that such occurrences have happened and continue to happen in the world today.

Keener offers his own biographical sketch of Jesus, which is not too dissimilar from that of Bock (or from that of the Synoptic Gospels).²⁴ Jesus was from Nazareth and, after being baptized by John, he called disciples and conducted a ministry among the fishing villages of Galilee. As a teacher and prophet he told and interpreted parables (including, perhaps, all of the ones found in the New Testament), preached about a kingdom of God that was both already present and yet still to come, demanded that his disciples leave their families and relinquish their possessions, mingled and dined with marginalized persons considered to be sinners, quarreled with Pharisees over purity practices and Sabbath laws, and reinterpreted traditional ethics by prioritizing the necessity of love.

Jesus also worked miracles and presented himself as the Messiah, albeit a messiah reinterpreted in terms of Daniel's Son of Man (Dan. 7:13–14). He claimed to be the eschatological Judge of the dawning end times, a figure who fulfilled but expanded all Jewish expectations in light of the unique relationship he had with God, his Father. He realized that he needed to die and taught his disciples that his crucifixion would function as an atonement. His tomb was subsequently found empty and, among the various explanations that can be offered for this, the most probable is that he rose bodily from

the dead in a manner that aroused the otherwise incredible resurrection faith of his disciples.

The depth of Keener's erudition is remarkable and, at some level, most scholars do take his work seriously. His knowledge of ancient literature is particularly impressive, such that almost half of his books are sometimes occupied with endnotes, hundreds of pages that offer thousands of references to parallel or analogous passages in Roman or Jewish writings suggestive of how the Gospel accounts of Jesus should be interpreted. Nevertheless, Keener has not obtained the stature within the guild that his prolific output and undeniable brilliance might suggest he would deserve. The reason is simply that he is regarded as something of an apologist, as one who is only interested in authenticating what can be authenticated rather than in determining what can and cannot be authenticated.

The distinction may seem like a fine one, but scholars have not failed to notice the absence of negative verdicts. Robert Miller says, "If Keener does indeed have doubts about the historical accuracy of any Gospel material, he keeps those doubts to himself."²⁵ The charge goes beyond bias (all scholars have biases) to allegations that Keener engages in special pleading.²⁶ Amy-Jill Levine notes that he insists the accounts of Jesus working miracles be accepted without any bias of antisupernaturalism, but she questions whether he would apply that position consistently when considering accounts

of people working miracles in other instances of religious historiography (the Qu’ran, the Book of Mormon).²⁷

Keener is likewise said to use ancient documents selectively, citing only the ones that help his cause. He cites numerous Roman historical writings that evince a clear attempt to get the story right, but ignores those that do not—indeed, he does not take into account works like the *Protoevangelium of James* and other apocryphal gospels that closely resemble the canonical Gospels in genre but obviously did invent material wholesale.²⁸ He also cites rabbinic documents centuries after the time of Jesus to show how disciples were like scribes who took notes and memorized teachings, but ignores passages in the Gospels that differentiate Jesus’s disciples from scribes, presenting them as infants who, unlike the wise and understanding, must rely on divine revelation (Matt. 11:25–27) and the Holy Spirit (John 14:25) to understand or even remember things about Jesus.²⁹

Of course, Keener would have intelligent responses to all of these objections,³⁰ but the point is that the perception that he is engaged in apologetics rather than in an actual quest to determine what can be regarded as historical keeps his work from being engaged in the same way as work by conservative Christians like Meier who seem more open to admitting much of what the Gospels report cannot be historically authenticated. Still—not to overstate the case—Keener’s main book on the historical Jesus has been endorsed by such

mainstream scholars as James Charlesworth, Joseph Fitzmyer, and Gerd Theissen, and even those who regard it as an example of apologetics recognize that much of what he has to say is worthy of consideration (that is, if he *is* doing apologetics, he is at least good at it).

Adapted from Mark Allan Powell, “Historical Jesus Studies and Christian Apologetics,” in Mark Allan Powell, *Jesus as a Figure in History*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, Westminster John Knox, 2013), 255–60.

1. A survey of how major theologians have addressed the problems history poses for faith can be found in Gregory W. Dawes, *The Historical Jesus Question: The Challenge of History to Religious Authority* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001).
2. Examples of such glosses would include Jesus’s claim that he came “to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45) or the clause at the Last Supper in which he says the cup is his blood “which is poured out for many” (Mark 14:24). See Scot McKnight, *Jesus and His Death: Historiography, the Historical Jesus, and Atonement Theory* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2005), 356, 359.
3. Elsewhere, I have put the matter this way: an evangelical Christian historian can say, “I cannot as a *historian* say whether this event happened, though as a Christian who believes in the divine inspiration of scripture, I personally believe it did happen, just as the Bible says.” See Mark Allan Powell, “Evangelical Christians and Historical-Jesus Studies: Final Reflections,” *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 9, no. 1 (2011): 124–36, citation on 135. This would accurately describe my own position on numerous matters.
4. Of course, we would not want to press the *vocabulary* employed in this distinction too far—the word *debate* can be used as a synonym for an argument, a discussion, or even a dialogue. Thus the “debate” recounted in Robert J. Miller, ed., *The Apocalyptic Jesus: A Debate* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge Press, 2001) is very

much an open-minded discussion in which four questing scholars seek to learn from one another.

5. Somewhat to my chagrin, a European edition of the first edition of my *Jesus as a Figure in History* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998) was actually published under the title *The Jesus Debate* (Oxford: Lion, 1998). Suffice to say, I was not consulted concerning that title, which I would not have approved (since many of the persons described in the book would insist they are engaged in a quest, *not* a debate).

6. See, e.g., the published debate between a well-known apologist and a founder of the Jesus Seminar: Paul Copan, ed., *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up: A Debate between William Lane Craig and John Dominic Crossan* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001). In this volume, Crossan notes that the debate was fruitful precisely because the goal was understanding not conversion—people with incompatible presuppositions can understand and respect one another's positions while recognizing there is no chance of getting the other to change his or her mind (149).

7. So, Crossan maintains the problem arises when people present themselves as belonging to one group when they are actually members of a different group “in disguise”; then theological arguments are misrepresented as historical ones. See John Dominic Crossan, “Reflections on a Debate,” in Copan, ed., *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up*, 147–55.

8. So, Robert Funk dismissed the entire so-called Third Quest (with specific reference to N. T. Wright, Raymond Brown, and John Meier) as “an apologetic ploy.” See *Honest to Jesus: Jesus for a New Millennium* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 65.

9. See Darrell L. Bock, “The Historical Jesus: An Evangelical View,” in *Historical Jesus: Five Views*, ed. James K. Beilby and Paul Rhodes Eddy (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 249–300; Bock, *Jesus According to Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002); Bock, *Studying the Historical Jesus: A Guide to Methods and Sources* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002).

10. See Craig S. Keener, *Historical Jesus of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009); Keener, *Miracles: The Credibility of New Testament Accounts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011).
11. To some extent, such suspicions may also attend the reception of the book, *Key Events in the Life of the Historical Jesus: A Collaborative Exploration of Context and Coherence*, ed. Darrell Bock and Robert Webb (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009). The volume collects essays by biblically orthodox Christian scholars that seek to authenticate the probable historicity of twelve major events in the reported life of Jesus. The book is an undeniably significant work (ten years in the making) and the contributors all appeal to traditional criteria, employed in ways that find wide acceptance within the guild. Still, reviewers do notice that only arguments in favor of historicity are seriously entertained; there is no apparent openness to discovering that anything reported of Jesus is probably nonhistorical (or even unverifiable).
12. See especially Bock, "Historical Jesus: An Evangelical View." His book *Jesus according to Scripture* attempts to show that the Gospels present a coherent and credible portrait of Jesus but it does not overtly attempt to determine what aspects of this portrait might or might not be authenticated historically. Indeed, the book's premise seems to be that a more adequate vision of Jesus is obtained by viewing him as he is presented in Scripture rather than through tenuous historical reconstructions.
13. Bock, "Historical Jesus: An Evangelical View," 275. On the claim that a charge of blasphemy led to Jesus's execution, see Bock, *Blasphemy and Exaltation in Judaism and the Final Examination of Jesus* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), and, more briefly, Bock, "Blasphemy and the Jewish Examination of Jesus," in *Key Events*, 589–668.
14. On this see especially, Bock, *Studying the Historical Jesus*.
15. Luke Timothy Johnson, "Response to Darrell L. Bock," in Beilby and Eddy, eds., *Historical Jesus: Five Views*, 293–96.

16. For Bock's own take on this, see Darrell L. Bock, "Faith and the Historical Jesus: Does a Confessional Position and Respect for the Jesus Tradition Preclude Serious Historical Engagement?" in *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 9, no. 1 (2011): 3–25.
17. Robert M. Price, "Response to Darrell L. Bock," in Beilby and Eddy, eds., *Historical Jesus: Five Views*, 282–87.
18. Johnson, "Response to Darrell L. Bock," 296.
19. Robert J. Miller, "When It's Futile to Argue about the Historical Jesus," *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 9, no. 1 (2011): 85–95.
20. John Dominic Crossan, "Response to Darrell L. Bock," in Beilby and Eddy, eds., *Historical Jesus: Five Views*, 288–92; James D. G. Dunn, "Response to Darrell L. Bock," in Beilby and Eddy, eds., *Historical Jesus: Five Views*, 297–300.
21. See especially Keener, *Historical Jesus of the Gospels*, 71–162.
22. Keener, *Miracles*.
23. On this point, see also Werner H. Kelber and Samuel Byrskog, eds., *Jesus in Memory: Traditions in Oral and Scribal Perspectives* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2009).
24. Keener, *Historical Jesus of the Gospels*, 163–349.
25. Robert J. Miller, "Review of *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels* by Craig Keener," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 41, no. 1 (2001): 50–52, citation on 51.
26. Miller writes, "One gets the impression that the possibility of anything that would buttress the reliability of the Gospels is, for Keener, sufficient grounds for accepting its actuality" ("Review," 52).
27. Levine, "Christian Faith and the Study of the Historical Jesus: A Response to Bock, Keener, and Web," *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 9, no. 1 (2011): 101. The same point is made independently by Miller, "When It's Futile to Argue," 90–93.

28. Levine, "Christian Faith and the Historical Jesus," 103.

29. Mark Allan Powell, "Evangelical Christians and Historical-Jesus Studies: Final Reflections," *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 9, no. 1 (2011): 132–33. Compare Levine, "Christian Faith and the Historical Jesus," 101–2.

30. See, e.g., Craig S. Keener, "A Brief Reply to Robert Miller and Amy-Jill Levine," *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 9, no. 1 (2011): 112–17. E.g., he notes the *Protoevangelium of James* is a later work than the New Testament Gospels; the propensity for "free composition" is much less when the biographer treats a recent subject.

4.21

Psychological Studies of the Historical Jesus

Psychohistory or psychobiography is a subdiscipline of the social sciences that attempts to construct psychological profiles of historical figures.¹ Both psychologists and historians tend to view such endeavors with skepticism. Psychologists claim it is a risky business to analyze someone without actually putting them “on the couch,” that is, without asking them the sort of questions psychologists want to ask their patients and hearing their responses. Historians prefer to confine discussion of *motives* to what would have been apparent, to what the subject claimed his or her motives were and to what other people might have said the subject’s motives were—a rather different matter from detection of ulterior or hidden motives that neither the subject nor anyone else would have discerned at the time.

Nevertheless, the practice of psychobiography has a rich history: Freud did an analysis of Leonardo Da Vinci, and Erik Erikson wrote psychological biographies of Martin Luther and Gandhi, though few would now consider those works to be exemplars of the genre.² The field refined its methodology in the latter part of the twentieth century and became more widely respectable. That said, the possibility of doing a psychological biography of Jesus strikes many as particularly daunting, since we have nothing but third-party testimony regarding him: we have no writings from Jesus himself, only

recollections of things he might have said or done, compiled by people who had never actually met him.

Albert Schweitzer wrote a dissertation on what he called “psychiatric studies of Jesus” that had been produced in the nineteenth century.³ He regarded such studies with total disdain, and offered a devastating critique of them as wildly conjectural. Nevertheless, such studies continued to be produced throughout the twentieth century, almost always by persons trained in psychology but ignorant of basic methods or procedures employed by historical Jesus scholars.⁴

There was no consideration of sources or application of criteria that might allow for discernment of which material in the Gospels should actually be attributed to Jesus.

For example, a psychological study of Jesus produced by Jay Haley in 1969 basically takes the Gospel of Matthew as a straightforward record of Jesus’s life and teachings.⁵ Many of Haley’s observations regarding Jesus’s psychological motivations are offered in reference to comments that Jesus makes only in Matthew, comments that the great majority of biblical scholars would assume Matthew himself added to the story of Jesus when he was redacting the Gospel of Mark. Thus if Haley’s observations are correct, they would apply more appropriately to the psychological motivations of Matthew (a late-first-century Christian evangelist) rather than to those of Jesus (an early-first-century Jewish peasant).

Nevertheless, Haley's work might not need to be rejected in toto: sometimes, almost unwittingly, he does treat material that historical Jesus scholars would deem authentic, and then his observations strike some as illuminating.⁶ He regards Jesus's blistering attacks on religious leaders (found in material Gospel scholars would ascribe to Q, e.g., Matt. 23:13–36; Luke 11:37–52) as a power tactic in which one challenges the status of social superiors and so (unless successfully shamed) elevates one's own status. Likewise, Jesus's tendency to claim he is not advocating change while in fact advocating fundamental change (presenting radical deviations as "truer expressions" of tradition) displays a rhetorical strategy familiar to psychologists who study power tacticians.

The new millennium has brought a renaissance in psychohistorical studies of Jesus in that such studies are now being conducted by persons conversant with a historical-critical approach to the Bible. Three major studies produced around the turn of the millennia have attracted the most attention.

In 1997, John Miller published *Jesus at Thirty*, a brief work that sought to draw inferences regarding Jesus's likely psychological state on the basis of widely accepted facts concerning him, and to investigate the Gospel materials in light of this possible psychological portrait.⁷ Miller, a theologian and a psychiatrist, starts with the presumption that at the time Jesus began his adult ministry he was unmarried and the oldest sibling in a family in which the

father was no longer present (probably, though not necessarily, due to the latter's death). Miller further supposes that Jesus must have had a loving, caring relationship with his now-absent father as would be suggested by the prominent use of father-son relationships in his parables.

Miller draws on insights from Erik Erickson and Daniel Levinson to describe the sort of identity crisis a person in such a situation would typically undergo. In all likelihood, a man in these circumstances would continue to seek a father figure while simultaneously developing an enhanced capacity for "generativity," becoming in effect a surrogate father to others. Miller suggests this may account for Jesus's extraordinary conceptualization of God as *Abba* (father)—he appears to have emphasized the fatherly nature of God to an unprecedented extent. It may also account for the manner in which he relates to others, evidenced for example in his habit of calling adult women "daughter" (Mark 5:34, 41).

Donald Capps, a specialist in the psychology of religion, starts with an assumption that the legitimacy of Jesus's birth was questionable: his biological father was probably unknown and Joseph did not adopt him but rather regarded James, the second boy born to Mary, as his first-born.⁸ The reason Jesus did not marry, Capps suggests, was not (per Miller) because his duties as surrogate father to the family prevented it but because Joseph did not find him a wife. Jesus was a social outcast, excluded from participation in temple religion, and for

this reason he was attracted to John the Baptist's alternative religious movement.

Eventually, Jesus found a fictive identity as the Son of God, believing that the heavenly Abba had adopted him when he was cleansed of his intrinsic impurity (as one illegitimately conceived) by John's baptism. He directed his repressed anger (toward his unknown biological father and toward Joseph) at demons, becoming an effective exorcist. As such, he was able to effect psychosomatic cures of people who suffered from what would now be diagnosed as "somatoform disorders," which include conditions in which paralysis, blindness, deafness, seizures, uncontrolled menstrual flow, and other actual physical disabilities are manifested without any neurological cause.⁹ Jesus may be diagnosed as a utopian-melancholic personality: he looked forward to a coming kingdom of God while continuing to seek cleansing from the sexual pollution in which he had been conceived; these tendencies eventually led him to perform an impulsive act in the temple (cleansing an institution that, for him, represented his mother's body). The fact that this led to his death fits with a tendency for melancholic personalities to be suicidal.

Andries van Aarde is a biblical scholar and a member of the Jesus Seminar. His work *Fatherless in Galilee* posits a hypothetical "Ideal type" for Jesus that he believes makes sense of numerous features in the Gospel tradition.¹⁰ Van Aarde thinks that Jesus probably grew

up as the bastard son of a single mother—the very existence of Joseph is a later Christian fiction (the character being based loosely on the character of Joseph in the Pentateuch). Thus he was an outcast and a sinner; as a *mamzer* (the child of an adulterous or incestuous relationship) he was not allowed to marry and he was excluded from Israel's primary religious institutions. Absent a father, furthermore, Jesus's status as a male was not clarified in puberty and so he grew into adulthood displaying female behavior, which in that culture included "taking the last place at table, serving others, forgiving wrongs, having compassion, and attempting to heal wounds."¹¹ Seeing himself as a protector of other marginalized individuals, Jesus formed an alternative religious community around himself that was largely composed of women without husbands and of children without fathers.

Despite the superficial attention to historical methodology (criteria, sources, etc.), these three studies of Jesus have not received much attention or support within the guild of historical Jesus studies as a whole. There is lingering suspicion about the field of psychohistory (dismissed by some as a pseudoscience), but even scholars willing to grant the possibility of such research note that these studies seem highly conjectural and speculative. Jesus's act in the temple could have been impulsive (rather than calculated), as Capps suggests, but most historical Jesus scholars see no reason for assuming it was. The children whom Jesus welcomes and calls the greatest in the kingdom could have been orphans or bastards, as van Aarde

assumes, but no document actually says that they were. Even more to the point, virtually everything these three scholars say depends upon assumptions regarding Jesus's childhood—and most historical Jesus scholars maintain that this is the one aspect of Jesus's biography about which we are least informed. It is axiomatic in historical Jesus studies to work primarily with material in Mark and Q—neither of which mentions Jesus's birth, childhood, or upbringing. So given a paucity of data, which would be problematic in any construction, these scholars focus on points that seem especially tenuous and make those points foundational for their entire enterprises.

It is possible that Jesus had a loving father who died before he reached adulthood (Miller), or that he had an estranged relationship with a potential father who refused to adopt him (Capps), or that he had no father figure in his life at all (van Aarde). But the mere fact that all three of these scenarios are possible suggests that none of them is obviously preferable. It seems to most historical Jesus scholars that Miller, Capps, and van Aarde are working backward from the ends to the means: they are starting with the adult Jesus evident in the biblical materials and suggesting what sort of childhood traumas and father-issues might have produced that person. But does psychological analysis normally proceed that way, guessing what a subject's childhood might have been like, based on the person they eventually became? And if such a procedure would be somewhat suspect with a current, living subject, should it not be

regarded as even more tenuous with a historical subject for whom significant aspects of the adult portrait remain unclear? Nevertheless, some scholars (including the author of this essay) have been willing to grant that any one (or possibly all three) of these studies could be on to *something*; in time, these projects may come to be viewed as pioneering efforts in a new interdisciplinary program.¹²

Another scholar, meanwhile, has taken up psychological analysis of Jesus in a somewhat different vein. Bas van Os remains critical (though respectful) of the three studies discussed above, but he still maintains that psychohistory does have a legitimate place in historical Jesus studies. Rather than attempting to write a psychological biography of Jesus, however, van Os proposes that different psychological theories may help us to understand certain well-documented aspects of Jesus's life and ministry.¹³ In place of a monograph, van Os offers a series of essays. For instance, Jesus's veneration of God as Father may be understood in terms of contemporary attachment theory. His belief that his own death might be beneficial and in accordance with God's will can be understood as a coping mechanism, inspired first by his need to deal with the death of John the Baptist and subsequently refined in light of threats to his own life. His performance of symbolic actions predicated by Scripture (entering Jerusalem on a donkey, cleansing the temple, enacting a new covenant at his final meal) can be understood in light of role theory, according to which a person can position him- or

herself within a cherished narrative, assuming the role of the characters and subsequently playing out those roles in real life.

Whatever one makes of van Os' individual points, most historical Jesus scholars seem to think this modest, thematic approach to psychohistory is more promising for Jesus's studies than are the attempts to produce psychological biographies of a person for whom so much relevant data is lacking or limited.

1. See James H. Charlesworth, "Psychobiography: A New and Challenging Methodology in Jesus Research," in *Psychology and the Bible: A New Way to Read the Scriptures*, ed. J. H. Ellens and W. G. Rollins, 4 vols. (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2004), 4:21–57; Bas van Os, *Psychological Analyses and the Historical Jesus: New Ways to Explore Christian Origins* (New York: T&T Clark, 2011); Fraser Watts, ed., *Jesus and Psychology* (Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation, 2007).
2. For bibliography of these and many other works (including studies of Ezekiel, King Herod, Ignatius of Loyola, Augustine, Joseph Smith, and Oscar Romero) see van Os, *Psychological Analyses and the Historical Jesus*, 13–14.
3. Albert Schweitzer, *The Psychiatric Study of Jesus*, trans. C. R. Joy (1913; repr. Boston: Beacon, 1948).
4. For a survey, see the three chapters Donald Capps contributed to Ellens and Rollins, eds. *Psychology and the Bible*, 4:89–208.
5. Jay Haley, "The Power Tactics of Jesus Christ," in *The Power Tactics of Jesus Christ and Other Essays*, 2nd ed. (Rockville: Triangle, 1986), 19–53.
6. Donald Capps alerted Jesus scholars to the enduring (though limited) validity of Haley's work in his article, "Jesus as Power Tactician," *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 2, vol. 2 (2004): 158–89.

7. John W. Miller, *Jesus at Thirty: A Psychological and Historical Portrait* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997); see also Miller, "Jesus: A Psychological and Historical Portrait," in *Psychology and the Bible*, ed. Ellen and Rollins, 4:71–88.
8. Donald Capps, *Jesus: A Psychological Biography* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2000); see also Capps, "A Psychobiography of Jesus," in *Psychology and the Bible*, ed. Ellen and Rollins, 4:59–70.
9. On this point, see especially Donald Capps, *Jesus the Village Psychiatrist* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008).
10. Andries van Aarde, *Fatherless in Galilee: Jesus as Child of God* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001); see also van Aarde, "Social Identity, Status Envy, and Jesus as Fatherless Child," in *Psychology and the Bible*, ed. Ellen and Rollins, 4:223–46.
11. Van Aarde, "Social Identity," 237.
12. I shared my positive estimation of this potential in an unpublished paper at the 2006 Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature Psychology and Biblical Studies Section. Compare Charlesworth, "Psychobiography." Charlesworth thinks that, of these three scholars (Miller, Capps, van Aarde), Miller presents the portrait that has the least congruity with historically plausible biblical data. I think the opposite: Miller is the least conjectural of the three, sticking most closely to what most biblical scholars and Jesus historians would regard as historically plausible data.
13. See van Os, *Psychological Analyses and the Historical Jesus*. His overall project, however, is more ambitious, namely to construct a psychologically plausible theory of how Jesus could have contributed to the earliest beliefs concerning him, as discerned in key passages of the undisputed Pauline letters.

4.22

The Historical Significance of Jesus (Box 4.1)

On a spring morning in about the year 30 CE, three men were executed by the Roman authorities in Judea. Two were “brigands.” . . . The third was executed as another type of political criminal. He had not robbed, pillaged, murdered or even stored arms. He was convicted, however, of having claimed to be “king of the Jews”—a political title. Those who looked on . . . doubtless thought that the world would little note what happened that spring morning. . . . It turned out, of course, that this third man, Jesus of Nazareth, would become one of the most important figures in human history.

E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (London: Penguin, 1993),

1.

Regardless of what anyone may personally think or believe about him, Jesus of Nazareth has been the dominant figure in the history of Western culture for almost twenty centuries. If it were possible, with some sort of super-magnet, to pull up out of that history every scrap of metal bearing at least a trace of his name, how much would be left?

Jaroslav Pelikan, *Jesus through the Centuries* (New Haven, Yale

University Press, 1985), 1.

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Provided courtesy of N. Clayton Croy

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Herod the Great

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5.7

Four Pictures of Jesus (Box 5.1)

- The Gospel of Matthew presents Jesus as the one who abides with his people always until the end of time. Jesus founds the church, in which sins are forgiven, prayers are answered, and the power of death is overcome (Matt. 16:18–19; 18:18–20).
- The Gospel of Mark presents Jesus as the one who announces the advent of God’s reign, in which the humble are exalted and the proud brought low. Obedient to this rule, he dies on a cross, giving his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45).
- The Gospel of Luke presents Jesus as the one whose words and deeds liberate those who are oppressed. Jesus comes to seek and to save the lost and to bring release to all those whom he describes as “captives” (Luke 4:18; 19:10).
- The Gospel of John presents Jesus as the one who reveals what God is truly like. Jesus is the Word of God made flesh, and he reveals through his words and deeds all that can be known of God (John 1:14; 14:8).

5.8

Sayings of Jesus: Some Examples (Box 5.7)

Wisdom sayings provide insight into how life really works:

- “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Luke 12:34)
- “If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand.” (Mark 3:24)

Prophetic sayings proclaim the activity or judgment of God:

- “The kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.” (Mark 1:15)

Eschatological sayings reflect the view that the future is of primary importance:

- “The Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done.” (Matt. 16:27)

Legal sayings interpret God’s will:

- “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.” (Matt. 7:12)

“I” sayings are autobiographical:

- “I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.” (Mark 2:17)

- “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”
(John 10:10)

5.9

Pronouncement Stories in the Gospels: Some Examples (Box 5.6)

Correction Stories

- let the dead bury the dead (Matt. 8:21–22)
- forgive seventy-seven times (Matt. 18:21–22)
- whoever wants to be first (Mark 9:33–35)
- whoever is not against us (Mark 9:38–40)
- who is truly blessed (Luke 11:27–28)

Commendation Stories

- the confession by Peter (Matt. 16:13–20)
- the generous widow (Mark 12:21–44)
- the woman who anoints Jesus (Mark 14:3–9)

Controversy Stories

- eating with sinners (Mark 2:15–17)
- Jesus's disciples don't fast (Mark 2:18–22)
- picking grain on the Sabbath (Mark 2:23–28)
- eating with defiled hands (Mark 7:1–15)
- by what authority? (Mark 11:27–33)
- paying taxes to Caesar (Mark 12:13–17)
- whose wife will she be? (Mark 12:18–27)

See Robert C. Tannehill, "The Gospels and Narrative Literature," in *The New Interpreters Bible: New Testament Survey* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), 1–16.

5.10

Parables in the Gospels (Box 5.3)

Parable	Matthew	Mark	Luke
New patch on an old cloak	9:16	2:21	5:36
New wine in old wineskins	9:17	2:22	5:37–38
The sower	13:3–8	4:3–8	8:5–8
Lamp under a bowl	5:14–16	4:21–22	8:16; 11:33
Seed growing secretly		4:26–29	
Mustard seed	13:31–32	4:30–32	13:18–19
Wicked tenants	21:33–44	12:1–11	20:9–18
Fig tree	24:32–33	13:28–29	21:29–31
Watchful slaves		13:33–37	12:35–38
Wise and foolish builders	7:24–27		6:47–49
Yeast leavens flour	13:33		13:20–21
Lost sheep	18:12–14		15:4–7
Thief in the night	24:42–44		12:39–40
Faithful and wise slave	24:45–51		12:42–48
The talents (or the pounds)	25:14–30		19:12–27
Weeds among the wheat	13:24–30		
Treasure hidden in a field	13:44		
Pearl of great value	13:45–46		
Net full of good and bad fish	13:47–50		
Treasure new and old	13:52		
Unmerciful servant	18:23–34		
Workers in the vineyard	20:1–16		
Two sons	21:28–32		
Wedding banquet	22:2–14		
Ten bridesmaids	25:1–13		
The two debtors			7:41–43
The good Samaritan			10:30–37
Friend at midnight			11:5–8
Rich fool			12:16–21
Severe and light beatings			12:47–48
Barren tree			13:6–9
Lowest seat at a banquet			14:7–14
Excuses for not attending a banquet			14:16–24

Building a tower			14:28–30
Waging war			14:31–32
Lost coin			15:8–10
Prodigal son			15:11–32
Shrewd manager			16:1–9
Rich man and Lazarus			16:19–31
Slave serves the master			17:7–10
Widow and judge			18:2–5
Pharisee and tax collector			18:10–14

5.11

Miracle Stories in the Gospels (Box 5.5)

	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Healings and Exorcisms				
Demoniac in synagogue		1:23–26	4:33–35	
Peter's mother-in-law	8:14–15	1:30–31	4:38–39	
Man with leprosy	8:2–4	1:40–42	5:12–13	
Paralytic	9:2–7	2:3–12	5:18–25	
Man with withered hand	12:10–13	3:1–5	6:6–10	
Gadarene demoniac(s)	8:28–34	5:1–15	8:27–35	
Woman with hemorrhage	9:20–22	5:25–34	8:43–48	
Gentile woman's daughter	15:21–28	7:24–30		
Deaf mute		7:31–37		
Blind man at Bethsaida		8:22–26		
Demon-possessed boy	17:14–18	9:17–29		
Blind Bartimaeus (and companion?)	20:29–34?	10:46–52		
Centurion's servant	8:5–13		7:1–10	4:46–54
(Blind) mute demoniac	12:22		11:14	
Two blind men	9:27–31			
Mute demoniac	9:32–33			
Crippled woman			13:11–13	
Man with dropsy			14:1–4	
Ten lepers			17:11–19	
High priest's servant			22:50–51	
Invalid at Pool of Bethesda				5:1–9
Man born blind				9:1–7
Resuscitation (dead brought back to life)				
Jairus's daughter	9:18–25	5:22–42	8:41–56	
Widow's son			7:11–15	
Lazarus				11:1–44
Provision				
Five thousand people fed	14:15–21	6:35–44	9:12–17	6:5–13
Four thousand people fed	15:32–38	8:1–9		
Catch of fish			5:1–11	
Changing water into wine				2:1–11

Post-Easter catch of fish				21:1–11
Miscellaneous				
Calming a storm at sea	8:23–27	4:37–41	8:22–25	
Walking on water	14:25	6:48–51		6:19–21
Transfiguration	17:1–8	9:2–8	9:28–36	
Withering a fig tree	21:18–22	11:12–25		
Predicting coin in fish’s mouth	17:24–27			
Vanishing at Emmaus			24:31	
Appearing in Jerusalem				20:19, 26

5.12

The Dying Words of Jesus (Box 5.8)

Jesus speaks seven times from the cross, but not seven times in any one Gospel. The Gospels relate three very different stories regarding Jesus’s dying words. In one story, Jesus speaks only once; in a second, he speaks three times; and in a third, he speaks another three times. However, there are no parallels between what is said in any one of these three stories and what is said in the other two stories.

Story A	Story B	Story C
Matthew and Mark	Luke	John
“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34).	“Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34).	“Woman, here is your son. . . . Here is your mother” (John 19:26–27).
	“Truly, I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43).	“I am thirsty” (John 19:28).
	“Father, into your hands, I commend my spirit” (Luke 23:46).	“It is finished” (John 19:30).

5.13

What Happens When Jesus Dies

In each of our four New Testament Gospels, the events that are narrated immediately after Jesus's death may indicate a primary concern for that particular book.

The Gospel of Mark: Immediately after Jesus dies, Mark tells us that the curtain in the Jerusalem temple tore from top to bottom (15:38) and that the centurion recognized that Jesus was the Son of God (15:39).

One interpretation: Mark believes that Jesus's death has provided a ransom for sin (10:45), making the sacrificial cult of the Jerusalem temple obsolete. Mark also wants to tell his readers that it is only through the cross that one can come to understand fully who Jesus is.

The Gospel of Matthew: Immediately after Jesus dies, Matthew tells us that the curtain in the Jerusalem temple tore in two and that an earthquake opened tombs in the cemetery such that the bodies of many saints came back to life and came out of their tombs. Then the centurion proclaimed that Jesus was the Son of God (27:51–54).

One interpretation: Matthew, like Mark, believes that Jesus's death has provided a once-for-all-time sacrifice for sin, but Matthew also wants to stress that Jesus's death opens the door to life after death.

It is in the context of this eternal dimension that he is to be regarded as the Son of God.

The Gospel of Luke: Immediately after Jesus dies, Luke tells us that the gentile centurion began to praise God, acknowledging Jesus's innocence, and that the multitudes who were present returned home, beating their breasts in repentance (23:47–48).

One interpretation: Luke is less concerned than Mark and Matthew with reflection on the theological meaning of Jesus's death (i.e., its redemptive or atoning effect); however, he is more concerned than the other Gospel writers with the proper response of people to what Jesus has done. Luke believes that the word of the cross should lead people to worship and repentance.

The Gospel of John: Immediately after Jesus dies, John tells us that his side was pierced with a spear, causing water and blood to gush forth (19:31–34).

One interpretation: John's Gospel is heavily symbolic, and water and blood are almost universal symbols for life. The flow of water and blood from a person's body is reminiscent of what happens when a woman gives birth. John may be implying that, even as Jesus dies, he gives birth to a new life for all those who believe in him.

5.14

People in the Gospels

This chart is organized in a manner similar to “flash cards,” indicating which Gospel character is to be identified with a particular action or trait. Note that some characters have more than one identifier.

the brother of Peter, one of Jesus’s twelve disciples	Andrew
a female prophet in the Jerusalem temple who prophesies over the baby Jesus	Anna
the father-in-law of Caiaphas (the high priest) who questions Jesus at his trial	Annas
a criminal released by Pilate after a crowd calls for Pilate to set him free instead of Jesus	Barrabas
a blind beggar healed by Jesus who then follows him on the way	Bartimaeus
the ruler of demons (another name for Satan in the New Testament)	Beelzebul
one of the two people to whom the risen Jesus appears on the road to Emmaus	Cleopas
the mother of John the Baptist who blesses Mary when she comes to visit	Elizabeth
the angel who tells Mary she will give birth to Jesus	Gabriel
kills babies in Bethlehem when the magi tell him the Messiah has been born there	Herod (actually Herod the Great)
arrests and then beheads John the Baptist at the request of his stepdaughter, Salome	Herod (actually Herod Antipas)
called a “fox” by Jesus	Herod (actually Herod Antipas)
questions Jesus briefly after he is arrested because he wants to see a miracle	Herod (actually Herod Antipas)
wife of Herod Antipas who	Herodias

prompts her daughter to ask for “the head of John the Baptist”	
the ruler of a synagogue, whose daughter Jesus raises from the dead	Jairus
the sons of Zebedee, two brothers who were disciples of Jesus	James and John
two disciples of Jesus, known as “the sons of thunder”	James and John
the two disciples of Jesus who ask if they can sit at his left and right in glory	James and John
the two disciples of Jesus who consider calling fire down from heaven to consume a Samaritan village	James and John
the wife of Herod’s steward who accompanies Jesus and provides for him and his disciples out of her resources	Joanna
the person who baptizes Jesus	John the Baptist
according to Jesus, his coming fulfills the prophecy of the return of Elijah	John the Baptist
while in prison, sends Jesus a question, “Are you the one who was to come?”	John the Baptist
beheaded by Herod at the request of Herodias’s daughter	John the Baptist
a rich man who provides a new tomb for Jesus’s body following his crucifixion	Joseph of Arimathea
a descendant of David who becomes Jesus’s father, adopting him into the Davidic line	Joseph
criticizes Mary of Bethany for anointing Jesus with expensive ointment	Judas Iscariot
the treasurer for the disciples—also said to be a thief who stole from the common purse	Judas Iscariot
betrays Jesus for thirty pieces of silver, then regrets the betrayal, returns the money, and hangs himself	Judas Iscariot
tax-collector called to follow Jesus, also known as “Matthew”	Levi
speaks the poetic words of “the	Mary the mother of Jesus

Magnificat" when she visits Elizabeth	
entrusted to the care of the "beloved disciple" by Jesus on the cross	Mary the mother of Jesus
the sister of Martha, who sits at Jesus's feet listening to his words	Mary of Bethany
the two sisters of Lazarus, whom Jesus raises from the dead	Mary and Martha
a woman who anoints Jesus and is criticized for wasting the ointment	Mary of Bethany
along with Joanna and Susanna, travels with Jesus and provides for Jesus and the disciples out of her resources	Mary Magdalene
encounters the risen Jesus in the garden and mistakes him for the gardener	Mary Magdalene
when told about Jesus by Philip, asks, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"	Nathanael
Jewish leader who comes to Jesus at night and hears that no one can see the kingdom of God without being "born again"	Nicodemus
Jewish leader who joins Joseph of Arimathea in placing Jesus's body in a tomb	Nicodemus
one of Jesus's twelve disciples, also known as Simon and Cephas	Peter
first disciple to identify Jesus as the Messiah, in Caesarea Philippi	Peter
identified as the rock on which Jesus says he will build his church	Peter
the disciple to whom Jesus gives "the keys to the kingdom of heaven"	Peter
the disciple to whom Jesus says, "Get behind me Satan" when he objects to an announcement of the cross	Peter
has partial success walking on water at Jesus's bidding	Peter
denies Jesus three times when he faces possible arrest for being a disciple	Peter

the disciple who Jesus asks three times, "Do you love me?," telling him, "Feed my sheep"	Peter
the three disciples taken up a mountain by Jesus for the Transfiguration	Peter, James, and John
the three disciples taken aside to pray with Jesus in Gethsemane (where they fall asleep)	Peter, James, and John
the disciple who brings his friend Nathanael to Jesus, inviting him to "Come and see"	Philip
the disciple who acts as an intermediary for some Greeks who want to meet Jesus	Philip
Roman governor who offers the crowd a choice of releasing Jesus or Barabbas	Pilate
washes his hands in front of the crowd, insisting, "I am free of this man's blood"	Pilate
in discussion with Jesus, asks "What is truth?"	Pilate
a priest in the Jerusalem temple who prophesies over Mary and over the baby Jesus	Simeon
speaks words of the "Nunc Dimittis" when he sees the Christ child	Simeon
carries the cross of Jesus to Golgotha	Simon of Cyrene
a man who hosts Jesus at his home in Bethany, where Jesus is anointed by a woman	Simon the leper
hosts a dinner at which Jesus's feet are washed with the tears of a prostitute	Simon the Pharisee
three women who are said to have accompanied Jesus and provided for him and his disciples out of their resources	Joanna, Susanna, and Mary Magdalene
otherwise unknown person to whom the Gospel of Luke and book of Acts are addressed	Theophilus
disciple who refuses to believe Jesus is risen until he sees for himself	Thomas
rich tax collector who climbs a sycamore tree to see Jesus	Zacchaeus

the father of John the Baptist who speaks the words of the "Benedictus" when John is born	Zechariah
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5.15

Characteristics of Ancient Biographies (Box 5.2)

- no pretense of detached objectivity
- no concern for establishing facts (e.g., by citing evidence or sources)
- little attention to historical data (names, dates, places)
- little attention to chronology of events or development of the subject's thought
- no psychological interest in the subject's inner motivations
- anecdotal style of narration
- emphasis on the subject's character and defining traits
- consistent focus on the subject's philosophy of life
- strong interest in the subject's death, as consistent with philosophy of life
- presentation of the subject as a model worthy of emulation
- depiction of the subject as superior to competitors or rivals
- overall concern with the subject's legacy, evident in followers who carry on the tradition

5.16

Plutarch on the Purpose of Writing a Biography

The great Roman author Plutarch (45–125 CE) wrote some fifty biographies of prominent Greek and Roman men. These books were produced at a time concurrent with the New Testament Gospels (or only a few years later) and were written for a similar audience (gentiles living in cities of the Roman empire).

Plutarch's biographies differ from the Gospels in key aspects (owing, in part, to the strong influence of Jewish religion and literature on the latter). Still, most scholars think that the Gospels are sufficiently similar to Plutarch's biographies for them to have been regarded as "biographies of Jesus" in the world in which they were produced.

In the opening chapter of his biography *Alexander* (on Alexander the Great), Plutarch offers these comments regarding his intent:

It is the life of Alexander the king, and of Caesar, who overthrew Pompey, that I am writing in this book, and the multitude of the deeds to be treated is so great that I shall make no other preface than to entreat my readers, in case I do not tell of all the famous actions of these men, nor even speak exhaustively at all in each particular case, but in epitome for the most part, not to complain. For it is not Histories that I am writing, but Lives; and in the most illustrious deeds there is not always a manifestation of virtue or vice, nay, a slight thing like a phrase or a jest often makes a greater revelation of character than battles when thousands fall,

or the greatest armaments, or sieges of cities. Accordingly, just as painters get the likenesses in their portraits from the face and the expression of the eyes, wherein the character shows itself, but make very little account of the other parts of the body, so I must be permitted to devote myself rather to the signs of the soul in men, and by means of these to portray the life of each, leaving to others the description of their great contests. (Plutarch, *Alexander*, 2.1–3)¹

In a similar fashion, the author of John's Gospel admits that there is an overabundance of material that could be reported about Jesus and, rather than trying to be comprehensive, he has limited himself to writing that which will serve his purpose: to bring the reader to believe in Jesus (John 20:30–31). Also, like Plutarch, the author of Luke's Gospel leaves it to others to tell some of the accounts of Jesus, focusing on those things that will allow his readers to know the truth about those things in which he or she has been instructed.

Plutarch, John, and Luke explicitly eschew any goal of comprehensive historical reporting; the goal of a biography is to tell those things that will serve a specific purpose: to reveal the essential character of a person. The New Testament authors simply took this a step further, believing that revealing the essential character of Jesus Christ would inspire or confirm faith.

1. Plutarch, *Lives: Demosthenes and Cicero. Alexander and Caesar*, trans. Bernadotte Perrin, Loeb Classical Library 99, vol. 7 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1919).

5.17

The Gospels and Apostolic Authorship (Box 5.9)

A popular misconception holds that the four New Testament Gospels were written by apostles—earthly followers of Jesus who were among his twelve disciples. But the church has always maintained that this was not the case for two of the Gospels (Mark and Luke), and Augustine thought that this was theologically significant: “The Holy Spirit willed to choose for the writing of the Gospels two who were not even from those who made up the Twelve, so that it might not be thought that the grace of evangelization had come only to the apostles and that in them the fountain of grace had dried up” (*Sermon 239.1*).¹

The great majority of scholars today would want to apply Augustine’s thinking to all four Gospels, since Matthew and John were also probably not composed by members of the Twelve, at least in the finished editions that we now possess.

1. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and Henry Wace, eds., *The Early Church Fathers* (1867; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 38:244.

5.18

A Jewish Perspective on Parables (Box 5.4)

The parable should not be lightly esteemed in your eyes, since by means of the parable one arrives at the true meaning of the words of the Torah.

—Midrash, Song of Songs Rabbah 1.8

Harry Freedman and Maurice Smith, eds., *Midrash Rabbah* (London: Soncino, 1939).

5.19

A Nonbiblical Exorcism Story

Exorcism stories were common in the Greco-Roman world and many people besides Jesus were reputed to have the gift to expel evil spirits that had forcibly taken control of a hapless victim.

This story is told of Apollonius of Tyana, a philosopher and miracle worker who is said to have been active in Asia Minor, Greece, and Rome during the first century CE (roughly contemporaneous with Jesus). It is taken from the book *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* by Philostratus, which was composed in the first half of the third century CE:

When he was treating of the best mode of offering libations, there happened to be present a young man who was very effeminate, and so proverbially luxurious, as fit to be made the subject of one of those songs that are used to be sung in the serving up of great feasts . . . the youth burst out into an immoderate fit of laughter. Whereupon Apollonius, looking steadfastly upon him, said, It is not you whom I consider as offering me this insult, but the demon within you: it is he who makes you in ignorance commit this folly. Till this moment the youth knew not he was possessed by a demon, though he laughed and cried in turns, without any apparent cause, and even sung and talked to himself. Many thought all this brought on by intemperance in his youth: but the fact was, he was

impelled by a demon, and committed all the wild extravagancies practised by people in that situation. As soon as Apollonius fixed his eyes upon him, the demon broke out into all those angry horrid expressions used by people on the rack, and then swore he would depart out of the youth, and never again enter another. Apollonius rebuked him, as masters do their cunning, saucy, insolent slaves, and commanded him to come out of the youth, and in so doing to give a visible sign of his departure.

Immediately the demon cried out, I will make that statue tumble, to which he pointed, standing in a royal portico, where the transaction happened. But who is able to describe the noise and tumult, and clapping of hands with joy, when they saw the statue first begin to shake, then totter, and then tumble down? The young man rubbed his eyes like one awoke from a deep sleep, and turning them to the sun's light, seemed quite shocked at the idea of standing so conspicuous and exposed to all beholders. He no longer retained the wild disturbed look of intemperance, but returned to his right mind, as if recovered by the use of medicine alone. Then laying aside his soft garments and all his fashionable Sybaritic airs, he adapted the homely simplicity and plain garb of a philosopher, and lived after the rules of Apollonius.¹

1. Philostratus, *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, trans. Edward Berwick (London: T. Payne, 1809), 4.20.

5.20

Parables as Allegories

A couple of Jesus's better-known parables are explicitly presented as allegories.

He explains the parable of the sower (Mark 4:2–9; cf. 4:13–20) this way:

seed	=	the word
birds eating seed on path	=	Satan snatching away the word
rocky ground	=	trouble or persecution
thorns	=	cares of the world, lure of wealth
good soil	=	those who accept the word and bear fruit

He explains the parable of the weeds (Matt. 13:24–30; cf. 13:36–43)

this way:

sower	=	Son of Man
field	=	the world
good seed	=	children of the kingdom
weeds	=	children of the evil one
enemy sower	=	the devil
harvest	=	end of the age
reapers	=	angels

Inspired by these explanations, biblical interpreters once wondered if all the parables might be allegories, and they devised elaborate explanations that unveiled secret theological or spiritual messages.

For example, Origen (third century) read the parable of the good Samaritan as providing an allegorical account of God's plan of salvation:

man who fell among robbers	=	Adam
Jerusalem	=	heaven
Jericho	=	the world
the robbers	=	the devil
the priest	=	the law
the Levite	=	the prophets
the Samaritan	=	Christ
the donkey	=	Christ's body
the inn	=	the church
the two coins	=	the Father and the Son
promise to return	=	second coming of Christ

Augustine (fourth century) proposed a similar reading, with additions:

binding of wounds	=	Christ's restraint of sin
pouring of oil	=	comfort of good hope
pouring of wine	=	exhortation to spirited work
the innkeeper	=	the apostle Paul

But Augustine disagreed with Origen on the two coins. They were not "the Father and the Son," but rather Christ's twofold commandment to love God and neighbor.

While creative, such interpretations are rejected by most scholars today. Jesus did not originally intend for his parables to be read in this way, nor did the Gospel authors anticipate that their readers would interpret them in such a fashion. Furthermore, most scholars

would caution that if construals such as these are allowed, clever interpreters will be able to make parables mean almost anything they please.

5.21

The Inexhaustible Meaning of Parables (Comment from Origen)

Origen (185-ca. 254) was an early Christian theologian associated with Alexandria in Egypt and Caesarea in Palestine. He is often remembered for producing elaborate allegorical interpretations of parables, most of which would fall out of favor with mainstream biblical scholarship with the development of critical methodologies.

Origen was aware, however, that parables can possess an almost inexhaustible supply of meaning, enough to confound any interpreter who thinks to have mastered them:

The writers of the Gospels have withheld any detailed exposition of the parables, because the things signified by them were beyond the power of words to express. Not even the whole world itself could contain the books that might be written to fully clarify and develop the parables. But it may happen that a receptive heart will grasp something of them. Purity of intent enables greater discernment of the parables, that they might become written on the heart by the Spirit of the living God.

But someone might then reply that we act with impiety when we want to give the parables' symbolic meaning, as if we had the authority to expound what is secret and mystical. This is sometimes claimed even in cases where one might suppose that we had some reasonable knowledge of their meaning.

But to this we must respond that, if there are those who have obtained some gift of accurate apprehension of these things, they know what they ought to do. But as for us, we readily acknowledge that we fall short of the ability to see into the depth of the things here signified.

We do better not to venture to commit to writing those things of which, even after much examination and inquiry, we have only some crass perception, whether by grace or by the power of our own minds. But some basic things, for the sake of our own intellectual discipline, and that of those who may chance to read them, we are permitted to some extent to set forth. (*Commentary on Matt. 14.12*)¹

1. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 10 vols. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1885–96), 9:502.

5.22

The Gospel: Four Stages

The word “gospel” (in Greek, *euangelion*) means “good news,” and in the first century it appears to have passed through four stages of application:

First, the term “gospel” was used to describe the content of Jesus’s preaching: “Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the good news [gospel] of God” (Mark 1:14). The “gospel” was essentially equivalent to “what Jesus said about God.”

Second, the word “gospel” was used to describe the content of early Christian preaching, which focused on the death and resurrection of Christ. When the apostle Paul says that he preached “the gospel of God” (Rom. 1:1–5), he does not mean that he repeated what Jesus said about God, but rather that he told people the good news of how Jesus had died for them and risen from the dead (see also 1 Cor. 15:1–8).

Third, as a combination of the above, the term “gospel” came to refer to preaching that summarized the ministry of Jesus in a way that included both what Jesus had said was the good news about God and what Christians had said was the good news about Jesus. A summary of such a sermon is found in Acts 10:34–43. And Mark 14:9 indicates that such preaching included anecdotes about the life and ministry of Jesus.

Fourth, the word “gospel” came to be used for books that offer in written form what previously had been proclaimed orally. The first such book probably was the one that we know as the Gospel of Mark, and it uses this term in its very first verse: “The beginning of the good news [*gospel*] of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”

See Mark Allan Powell, *Fortress Introduction to the Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 8–9.

5.23

Literary Characteristics of Parables

These observations on parables are drawn from Rudolf Bultmann's book *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*.¹ Bultmann discusses narrative parables, not parabolic one-line sayings.

Parables usually are concise. Only the persons who are absolutely essential to the story appear. In the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–32), no mention is made of a mother. In the story of the friend at midnight (Luke 11:5–8), no mention is made of the householder's wife. Never more than three persons or groups appear in the stories, and no more than two seem to appear at a time.

Parables usually are told from a single perspective. There is one series of events, always told from the point of view of one person. In the parable of the prodigal son, no information is given about the father's mood or actions while the son is away.

Characters in parables usually are presented to the reader through a process of showing rather than telling. It is rare that anyone in a parable is described by the narrator. We are told that the judge is unjust (Luke 18:2) and that the bridesmaids are wise and foolish (Matt. 25:2), but this kind of description is quite exceptional. The character of the persons involved emerges from their behavior.

Feelings and motives are described only when they are essential to the point of the story. We are told of the distress of

the fellow servants of the merciless servant (Matt. 18:31), of the joy of the shepherd and the woman who found the lost sheep and the lost coin (Luke 15:6, 9), the compassion of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:33). However, in stories of the prodigal son and of the Pharisee and the tax collector, the feelings of the people involved are expressed not through descriptions offered by the narrator but rather through the words and actions of the characters themselves.

There is little interest in motivation. The prodigal son's motives in leaving home are not offered. Nothing is allowed to detract attention from the point of the story.

Often there is no expressed conclusion to the story. We are not told that the rich fool died (Luke 12:13–21). We are not told whether the good Samaritan had to pay additional money (Luke 10:35). The main point is made, and that is the end of the story.

Usually there is a bare minimum of event. We are not told what the prodigal son's particular brand of loose living was (Luke 15:13), or what the offense was for which the widow sought justice from the uncaring judge (Luke 18:3).

Often there is direct speech and soliloquy, which makes for simplicity and vividness, and also speed of narrative. In a number of parables, the main characters speak to themselves. See, for example, the prodigal son (Luke 15:17–19), the shrewd manager (Luke 16:3–5), and the rich fool (Luke 12:17–19).

Often there is repetition of phrases, which has a kind of underlining effect. In the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14–30), we are told repeatedly of servants presenting their accounts to the master (Matt. 25:20, 22, 24).

Parables often exhibit end stress, which means that the most important point is scored at the last. The emphasis in the parable of the sower (Mark 4:3–8) is on the fourth type of seed, the only one to produce a lasting crop, just as the emphasis in the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:30–35) is on the third traveler, the one who does act as neighbor.

The stories and parables of Jesus involve the hearer or the reader. The parables lead to a verdict, which is based on antithesis and contrast. The reader is asked to affiliate with one side or the other.

1. Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 3rd ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 188–92.

5.24

Genre of a Healing Story

In the New Testament Gospels, the “healing story” becomes a recognized literary genre that exhibits the same essential characteristics almost everywhere it occurs:

- the presence of a person (or representative of that person) in need of healing, including details that heighten the miraculous deed, for example, the great length of the illness, previous failures at being healed, the horrible condition of the afflicted person, or various effects the sickness has on members of the community or household
- the powerful words and/or actions of the healer, including various bodily manipulations such as touching the ears, washing the eyes, commands to walk, or dialogue with demons
- the confirmation of the sudden healing, which often includes such details as a raised person eating again, the astonishment of those witnessing the event, a visible sign that demons have left a person, a return to previously impossible activity, and so forth.

See J. Keir Howard, *Disease and Healing in the New Testament* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2001).

5.25

Miracles and the Modern Mind

The New Testament contains numerous accounts of miracles—reports of observable events that would have no reasonable explanation according to the laws of nature. In addition to working miracles himself, Jesus also gives his followers the power to work miracles (e.g., Matt. 10:1, 8). Indeed, according to John’s Gospel, Jesus indicates that his followers would do greater works than he has done (John 14:12). The book of Acts especially emphasizes that spectacular miracles were wrought by Jesus’s earliest followers after they were empowered by the Holy Spirit (see, e.g., Acts 2:43; 4:30; 5:12; 6:8; 14:3; 15:12). The apostle Paul regards the working of miracles as a gift of the spirit (1 Cor. 12:10), claims to have worked miracles (*dynmesin*) himself (Rom. 15:19) and even indicates that the working of miracles should be regarded as a sign that one is truly an apostle (2 Cor. 12:12).

What do modern, educated people make of all this?

After the eighteenth-century movement known as the Enlightenment, it became commonplace for intellectuals to scoff at reports of the miraculous. A motto for historical or scientific investigation became “What can not happen, does not happen,” and belief in the supernatural came to be defined as “superstition.”

Christian theologians tried to salvage the faith through various measures:

- Heinrich Eberhard Gottlob Paulus (1761–1851) developed elaborate rational explanations for most of the miracle stories in the Bible: raisings from the dead were actually arousals from comas or “deliverances from premature burial.”
- Ernst Renan (1823–92) entertained the notion that some of the miracles were hoaxes, staged events to draw attention to Jesus and his message.
- David Friedrich Strauss (1808–74) proposed that the miracle stories should be understood as mythological reports, poetic accounts that used symbolic imagery to convey meaning to a primitive audience that lacked the categories for truth that we possess today.

Strauss’s position became a dominant one. For an increasing number of intellectually sophisticated Christians, the miracle stories could be accepted as tales that convey philosophical truth rather than historical or scientific fact. The story of Jesus changing water into wine, for example, signifies the transformative impact that his word has on human lives.

Rudolf Bultmann’s (1884–1976) work in the twentieth century became associated with this mythological understanding of miracles. Bultmann sought to “demythologize” the New Testament stories in

order to uncover the kernel of existential engagement that each story sought to convey. Such demythologizing is necessary, Bultmann maintained, because the modern worldview does not allow for miracles in a literal sense.

John Meier, a contemporary Roman Catholic scholar, reacts sharply to Bultmann's characterization of the "modern worldview." A Gallup poll revealed that in 1989 that about 82 percent of Americans surveyed believed that "even today, miracles are performed by the power of God." Thus, as far as Meier is concerned, "the academic creed of 'no modern person can believe in miracles' should be consigned to the dustbin of empirically falsified hypotheses."¹ The fact is that most people, even the most well-educated people,² including Meier himself, do believe that what are popularly called supernatural events have occurred and, perhaps, still occur. Meier suggests that, if the majority of modern people do not view the world in line with what is called "the modern worldview," the accuracy of the latter label must be questioned.

Craig Keener presses Meier's point with even more urgency, insisting that Bultmann's so-called modern worldview is only relevant for (portions of) Western society. What Keener calls "the majority world perspective" (including, e.g., Africa, India, and Latin America) is quite different. The presumption that educated, intellectual people in the modern world do not believe in miracles is not only incorrect, but also racist. It regards educated, white Europeans as somehow

more “intellectual” or “sophisticated” than the educated people of nonwhite, non-European societies.³

With this background we can now delineate three general stances that twenty-first century theologians have taken with regard to this issue, allowing for some overlap of positions.

Methodological Neutrality

Most theologians regard religious claims concerning the supernatural as matters of faith unlikely to be embraced by those outside the specific faith circle.

Robert L. Webb carefully articulated the principle that undergirds such an attitude. Webb is concerned about how Christian intellectuals can be respected for their work in the public sphere. He proposes that a principle of “methodological naturalism” that allows scientists or historians to set a “definitional limit” for their work that prescind from making judgments based on faith commitments. For example, a Christian historian may believe quite strongly that a specific event was caused by God, but he or she should recognize that the field of historical inquiry does not allow for such an attribution. The limitation is only methodological: the historian is free to believe in divine causation, and should be able to say so without fear of ridicule. But even when the evidence for the occurrence of a miracle is strong, the historian must stop and say that they have gone as far as they can go using historical method: “The event occurred and I know of no natural explanation for it; as a Christian, I

happen to believe it was caused by God, but I recognize that this belief goes beyond the evidence of historical argumentation.”⁴

John Meier (see above) is also a good representative of this position. Despite his just noted reaction against the Bultmannian description of a “modern worldview,” Meier thinks it is unreasonable for a Christian ever to expect anyone who does not share their faith to believe that New Testament miracles (or analogous modern ones) have actually occurred. Whatever meaning Christians derive from the miracle stories (or from testimonies about miraculous occurrences today) must remain “in-house.” Christians who live in a multicultural world should not expect those who do not share their faith to believe such testimonies, nor should they demean anyone for not doing so.

Post-Enlightenment Denial

Some scholars renounce this “no comment” approach regarding supernatural occurrences as a cop-out. Historical science need not be cowed into supposedly objective silence regarding such matters, but has a responsibility to speak. All modern fields of inquiry depend on certain presuppositions regarding what is possible and what is impossible. Since the Enlightenment, the legitimacy of propositions has been evaluated on the basis of logic, reason, and empirical evidence, rather than simply being posited through an appeal to political or religious authorities. The problem with so-called

methodological neutrality is that it prevents scholars from going where the evidence would otherwise require them to go.

For example, some scholars would maintain that it is a historical fact that the early church invented the story about the virgin birth of Jesus near the end of the first century: historians should investigate why such a story was invented and try to determine what purpose it was intended to serve. But a scholar who believes Jesus actually was born to a virgin will not be prompted to ask those questions: even if such a scholar does not claim *as a historian* that the virgin birth happened, the scholar will be restricted from engaging important questions that should interest any post-Enlightenment thinker (who would take for granted that things that are impossible do not occur).

Gerd Lüdemann would be a representative of this position. In two books devoted to examining the New Testament's resurrection stories, he starts with what he believes can be taken for granted: Jesus did not actually rise from the dead. We know this for certain, and can reject it out of hand just as surely as we reject of Mohammed flying around on a winged horse or the Angel Moroni giving Joseph Smith golden plates and a pair of magic spectacles. If we do not face this undeniable historical fact (that Jesus stayed dead), we will not be pressed to investigate the actual sources of all those "resurrection appearance" stories in the New Testament. The significant question is, why did so many people come to believe that

Jesus had risen from the dead (when, obviously, he had not) and to believe this so strongly that they were willing to die for it? Ultimately, Lüdemann maintains that the resurrection appearances all have psychological explanations: for Peter, a subjective vision produced by his overwhelming guilt for having denied Jesus when he was arrested; for Paul, the resolution of an unconscious “Christ complex”; for the five hundred followers mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15:6, mass hysteria.

John Dominic Crossan tends in this direction as well. He dismisses most accounts of miracles out of hand but does allow that Jesus may have performed exorcisms and healings, since these do not necessarily demand that anything supernatural or scientifically impossible occurred. Crossan thinks Jesus healed people by relieving the negative social connotations attached to their physical condition without altering the condition itself.⁵ We do not know for certain what actually happened, but the cures could probably now be explained from an informed understanding of the interrelationship of mental, emotional, and physiological well-being.

Crossan objects on ethical grounds to Meier’s attempt to believe in supernatural events “as a Christian” without insisting on the occurrence of such events “as a historian.” He wonders what Meier might think of a colleague who took an analogous position regarding Caesar Augustus, whose mother is said to have been impregnated by a serpent in the temple of Apollo. Would Meier regard the person

who believes this really happened as intellectual and sophisticated (as long as this colleague granted it could not be verified historically)? Crossan has no trouble stating his own position “as a historian trying to be ethical”: “I do not accept the divine conception of *either Jesus or Augustus* as factual history.”⁶

Postmodern Openness

A third perspective on how theologians deal with miracle stories allows for a critique of the traditional paradigm for historical or scientific research. In short, some scholars believe it is responsible to challenge the strictures of post-Enlightenment thinking when those strictures do not appear to account for reality. Why should we have to impose a particular vision of reality on the evidence when some of the data do not fit neatly into the resultant grid? If there is substantial evidence that reality is not or has not always been the way post-Enlightenment scientific analysis suggests, then that evidence should be allowed to stand in critical disjuncture with scientific theories or historical reconstructions rather than being arbitrarily dismissed or ignored. This perspective often draws on postmodernism, which questions all forms of absolutism, including the claim that a post-Enlightenment (“modernist”) worldview is to be imposed as normative for intellectual inquiry.

N. T. Wright questions how “scientific” any method can really be if it is not open to having its own presuppositions challenged. “To insist at the beginning of an inquiry . . . that some particular contemporary

worldview is the only possible one . . . is to show that all we want to do is to hear the echo of our own voices.”⁷ He calls for “suspension of judgment,” which is not the same thing as maintaining neutrality: “It is prudent, methodologically, to hold back from too hasty a judgment on what is or is not possible within the space-time universe. There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in post-Enlightenment philosophy.”⁸ Further, if the best historical reconstruction of reality and the best post-Enlightenment scientific description of reality are incongruous, that may be a problem. But why should this problem be solved by requiring the historians to fudge their discipline for the sake of the scientists? Wright, for instance, dismisses as naive the notion that Jesus’s contemporaries were prone to believe in miracles because they did not understand the laws of nature. They did not need modern science to tell them that humans cannot walk on water. They were not stupid. They knew that five pieces of bread were not enough food to feed five thousand people. For Wright, then, the simplest and best explanation for the widespread report that Jesus worked these and other miracles is that “it was more or less true.”⁹ Wright seems to think that educated, sophisticated, and intellectual people of all persuasions can and should affirm this. Even non-Christians need to recognize that the man Jesus who lived on this earth did things that it is not normally possible for any human to do: this is a fact, a significant fact that believers and nonbelievers alike need to consider.

Ben Witherington III also raises this issue pointedly. He sees the suggestion that Jesus may have healed people by manipulating presently unknown natural causes as begging the question of why only explanations that are considered “natural” are to be allowed. Why would Jesus have been the only person of his day to have figured out how to use natural healing principles in such an incredibly effective manner? We are only required to adopt such desperate explanations if we reject out of hand an explanation that is not actually outlandish: there is a God, and this God used Jesus to do things that he could not otherwise have done. Sounding like Wright, he concludes, “In view of how little we know about our universe, do we really know that nothing can happen without a ‘natural’ cause?”¹⁰

Likewise, Graham Twelftree, in his extensive study of Jesus as a miracle worker, maintains that “there is good evidence and grounds for saying that the historical Jesus not only performed miracles but that he was an extraordinarily powerful healer of unparalleled ability and reputation.”¹¹ Twelftree realizes that those who do not believe in the existence of God will not acknowledge that Jesus’s miracles were acts of God but will seek other explanations for them (or simply maintain that they cannot be explained on the basis of current and available knowledge). That’s all right. But to say the miracles didn’t happen is to reject overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Further, he suggests that atheism is itself a religious or philosophical construct and, apart from the imposition of such a construct, almost

any objective investigator would conclude that these miracles occurred.¹²

Craig Keener (mentioned above) offers a sustained critique of what he calls “philosophical naturalism” or “antisupernaturalism” in a two-volume academic tome titled *Miracles*. Keener seeks to dismantle what he thinks is an epistemological bias, the legacy of David Hume’s limitation of history to that which can be understood as occurring in accord with natural law.¹³ Part of Keener’s critique includes detailed documentation of miracles that have occurred throughout the world, which leads him to maintain (as indicated above) that antisupernaturalism is not only a philosophical bias but a distinctively Western one.¹⁴

Spiritual Agnosticism

A fourth approach has been adopted by those who frankly don’t know what to think. They often find comfort in the writings of Marcus Borg, who considered all the views discussed here and basically said, “I don’t know.” Borg was usually regarded (with Crossan and Lüdemann) as a representative of “the religious left,” and he was frequently pitted in debates against folks like Keener, Witherington, and (especially) Wright. Still, he definitely believed in “a world of spirit” that is neither visible nor tangible and so cannot be studied in the same way as the visible world. This world of spirit might correlate with what some would regard as a supernatural realm, but Borg himself considered it an unrecognized or poorly understood part of

nature. Borg believes there is ample evidence throughout world history to indicate such a world exists and that there have been occasional gifted individuals who were somehow more in touch with that world than is typical. Jesus was such a person.

With regard to Jesus's miracles, Borg recognizes that many of them might simply be symbolic stories that were intended to inspire people or to make certain points. The New Testament contains "parables by Jesus," he would say, and also "parables about Jesus": the meaning of both will be lost if taken literally. But, he continues, there is much that we do not know about the nonvisible, nontangible world of spirit and we must admit that power from that world did enable Jesus to walk on water or to resuscitate genuinely dead people.¹⁵ To deny this as (at least) a hypothetical possibility would not be scientific. It is more intellectually honest to admit that there is abundant, seemingly reliable testimony for the occurrence of things that lie beyond our comprehension, and the wisest course is neither to reject nor accept such testimony uncritically. No one knows for sure what can happen, much less what did happen, and it is neither intellectually honest nor critically sophisticated to claim otherwise.

1. John Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, vol. 2, *Mentor, Message, and Miracles* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 520–21.

2. A nonpartisan research study in 2004 of 1,100 medical doctors in the United States found that 73 percent believe miracles sometimes occur. See "Science or Miracle? Holiday Season Survey Reveals Physicians' Views of Faith, Prayer, and Miracles," *Business Wire* (December 20, 2004).

3. Craig Keener, *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 211–358.
4. Robert L. Webb, “The Rules of the Game: History and Historical Method in the Context of Faith: The *Via Media* of Methodological Naturalism,” *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 9, no. 1 (2011): 82.
5. John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 319–20, 336–37.
6. John Dominic Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately after the Execution of Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 26–29, citation on 29. He does add that “as a Christian trying to be faithful” he *believes* “God is incarnate in the Jewish peasant poverty of Jesus and not in the Roman imperial power of Augustus” (29).
7. N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God 2 (Minneapolis, Fortress, 1996), 187.
8. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 187.
9. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 194. See also 186n160.
10. Ben Witherington III, *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 124.
11. Graham Twelftree, *Jesus the Miracle Worker: A Historical and Theological Study* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999), 345.
12. Twelftree, *Jesus the Miracle Worker*, 52.
13. Keener, *Miracles*, 107–208.
14. Many of the same points are made, with less detail, in Paul Rhodes Eddy and Gregory A. Boyd, *The Jesus Legend: A Case for the Historical Reliability of the Synoptic Jesus Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 39–90.
15. Marcus J. Borg, *Jesus: A New Vision: Spirit, Culture, and the Life of Discipleship* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 67.

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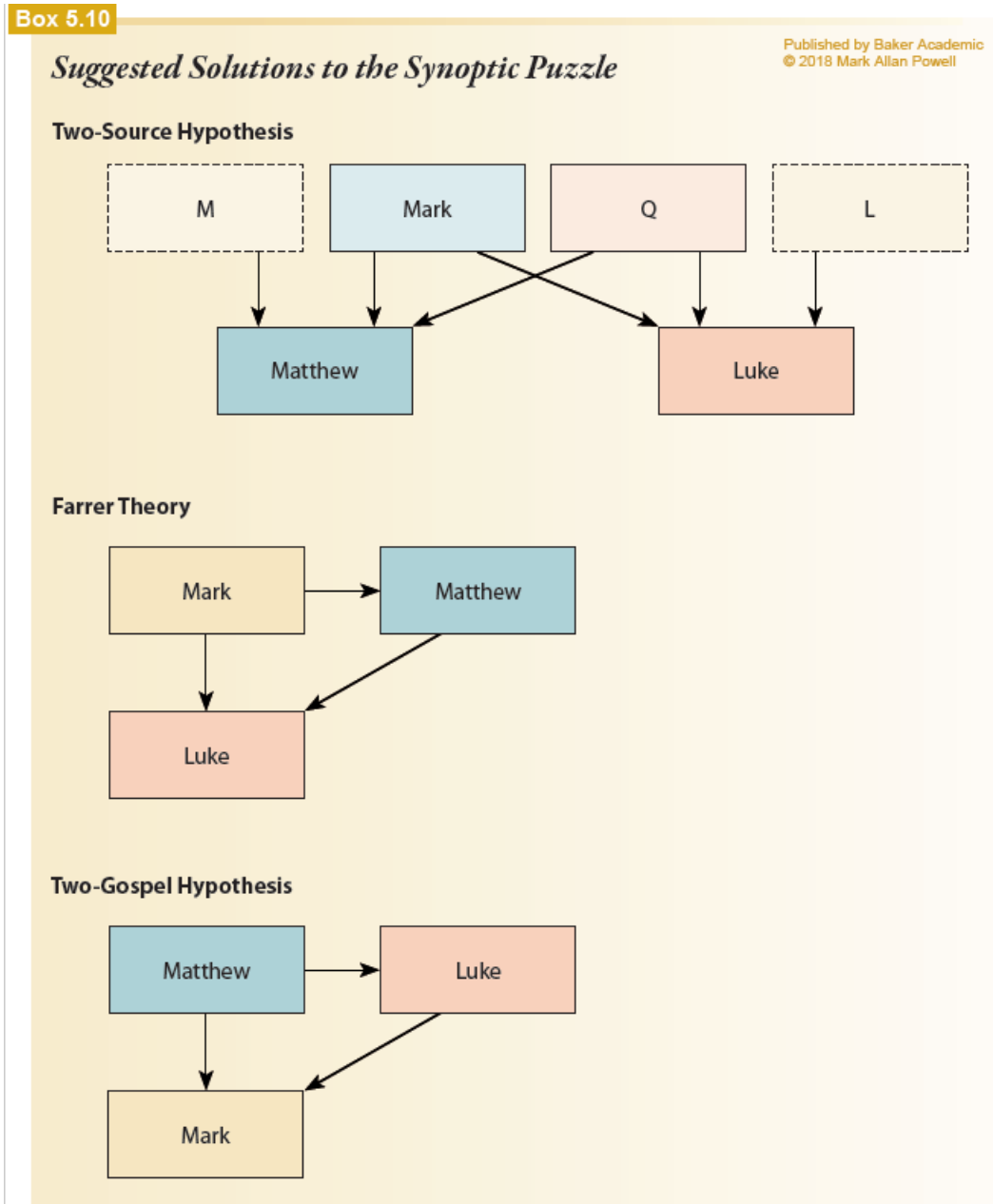
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5.26

Suggested Solutions to the Synoptic Puzzle (Box 5.10)



5.27

Evidence to Support the Two-Source Hypothesis

The Synoptic Puzzle

Analysis of parallel passages in the Synoptic Gospels yields the following data:

- A large amount of parallel material is found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.
- A large amount of parallel material is found in Matthew and Luke, but not Mark.
- Some parallel material is found in Matthew and Mark, but not Luke.
- A small amount of parallel material is found in Luke and Mark, but not Matthew.

The question of how to explain these relationships is called the “Synoptic Puzzle” (or the “Synoptic Problem”).

The Two-Source Hypothesis

- Mark was written first, and Matthew and Luke used Mark as a source.
- Matthew and Luke were produced independently of each other.

- Matthew and Luke also both used a now-lost collection of Jesus's sayings, which scholars call "Q."

The following points are often cited by supporters of the Two-Source Hypothesis as evidence for the validity of that theory.

Evidence That Matthew and Luke Used Mark as a Source

The significant overlap of material between Mark and the other two Synoptic Gospels suggests either (1) Mark used Matthew and/or Luke as a source, or (2) both Matthew and Luke used Mark. The latter seems more likely for these reasons:

- Omission of Markan material from Matthew and Luke is more explicable than is omission of Matthean and Lukan material from Mark.

Matthew and Luke may omit Mark's reference to being "salted with fire" (Mark 9:49) because the expression is not easy to understand, or they may omit Mark's story of the fleeing young man (14:51) because it seems irrelevant. But why would Mark omit the Lord's Prayer, the Beatitudes, or the story of the good Samaritan, much less stories of Jesus's birth or of his resurrection appearances?

- Divergences in Matthew and Luke from the sequence of material in Mark are more explicable than are divergences in Mark from the sequence of material in Matthew or Luke.

Miracles scattered throughout the first half of Mark are

gathered together in Matthew 8–9, providing a topical “miracle section” comparable to the preceding “teaching section” in Matthew 5–7; the story of Jesus’s rejection in Nazareth in Mark 6:1–6 is moved forward in Luke (4:16–30) because a hometown story makes logical sense before stories of his ministry elsewhere and because the story introduces the rejection of Jesus as a programmatic theme to be developed in the narratives of the ministry that follows. If we were to assume that Mark was copying from Matthew or Luke, the rationale for his altering their sequence of such events would be difficult to comprehend.

- Minor differences of language or fact are better understood as Matthean or Lukan improvements of Mark rather than as Markan corruptions of Matthew and Luke.

Greek syntax and grammar are more colloquial in Mark and more refined in both Matthew and Luke. For example, Herod is incorrectly called a king in Mark 6:14 but is correctly called a tetrarch in Matthew 14:1.

- Numerous inconsistencies in Matthew and Luke are more explicable on the premise that they use Mark as a source than they would be otherwise.

Matthew actually does call Herod a king in 14:9 but a tetrarch everywhere else because at 14:9 he is following Mark (6:26) and neglected (this time) to correct his source;

Luke 4:23 speaks of miracles in Capernaum that haven't happened yet (cf. Luke 4:31–37) because Luke bases the story in 4:16–30 on Mark 6:1–6, which in Mark's Gospel does come after the account of the Capernaum miracles (Mark 1:21–28; 2:1–12).

Evidence That Matthew and Luke Were Produced Independently of Each Other

With regard to sequence of events, Matthew and Luke frequently agree with each other and with Mark, but they rarely agree with each other against Mark. This suggests that Mark served as a basic outline used independently by both Matthew and Luke, who sometimes followed him and sometimes did not. If (as an alternative proposal suggests) Mark had copies of both Matthew and Luke and produced an abbreviation of their works, we would expect instances in which Mark departed from a sequence of events followed by both Matthew and Luke.

- Neither Matthew nor Luke includes the other's major additions to the Markan text.

Matthew's additions to Mark's story of the temple cleansing are not found in Luke (Mark 11:15–19; Matt. 21:12–17; Luke 19:45–48); Luke's additions to Mark's story of Jesus's transfiguration are not found in Matthew (Mark 9:2–8; Luke 9:28–36; Matt. 17:1–13).

- The likelihood that either Matthew or Luke used the other as a source is reduced by what would then be inexplicable omissions of material.

The story of the sheep and goats is found in Matthew (25:31–46) but not in Luke, though it would fit well with Luke’s characteristic concern for the poor; the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector is found in Luke (18:9–14) but not in Matthew, though it would fit well with Matthew’s polemic against the Pharisees.

- The material that Matthew and Luke have in common but that is not found in Mark is not found at the same place in their Gospels.

For example, Matthew places the woes against the Pharisees near the end of his Gospel, during the last week of Jesus’s life (23:13–36); Luke places them around the middle of Jesus’s ministry, while he is still in Galilee (11:37–12:1). This suggests that Matthew and Luke are independently using material from another source (Q); if Matthew were using Luke or if Luke were using Matthew, we would expect material that they have in common (but that is not found in Mark) to come at the same place in their Gospel stories.

Evidence for the Existence of Q as an Additional Source

Matthew and Luke have a great deal of material in common that is not found in Mark's Gospel. If they did not derive this material from Mark, and if neither of them derived it from the other, the logical conclusion is that they derived it independently from some additional source. This conclusion is bolstered by the following observations:

- The non-Markan material that Matthew and Luke have in common exhibits strong verbal agreement. The two Gospels often say exactly the same thing, displaying more word-for-word correspondence than in passages that they have derived from Mark.
- The non-Markan material that Matthew and Luke have in common often is presented in the same general sequence. This suggests that they are inserting material from an additional source into the basic Markan story (though, as indicated above, they never insert this material in exactly the same places in the Markan story).
- The non-Markan material that Matthew and Luke have in common exhibits a high degree of linguistic and theological consistency, suggesting that it came from a single, coherent document.

5.28

The Q Source in Contemporary Scholarship

Many New Testament scholars believe that both Matthew and Luke made use of a source in the composition of their Gospels that has been lost to us. For reasons unknown, this lost source has come to be called “Q” (one possible explanation for the name: “Q” is short for *Quelle*, the German word for “source”).

Written or Oral?

Some scholars have regarded Q as no more than a common body of oral tradition, but the majority of scholars now believe that it was a written document. Evidence for this includes the internal theological consistency expressed throughout the Q passages and the strength of the verbal agreements between these passages as they are reported in Matthew and in Luke, an agreement that frequently extends even to the order in which the passages occur.

Language

Scholars have long thought that Q was originally written in Aramaic and then rendered, independently, by both Matthew and Luke into Greek. Current opinion, however, is shifting toward the belief that Q was composed in Greek and came to both evangelists in that form. This matter is still debated.

Authorship

The church historian Eusebius (260–339) claimed to have a statement from someone named Papias, who said, around 135, “Matthew [i.e., the disciple of Jesus] compiled the sayings in the Hebrew [or Aramaic] language and each one interpreted them as he was able.” Eusebius took this as a reference to the book that we call the “Gospel of Matthew,” but New Testament scholars no longer believe that Matthew the disciple of Jesus wrote that book. Some scholars, however, think that Papias might have been referring to Q, and, therefore, that Q may have been compiled by Matthew the disciple of Jesus. This remains speculative.

Content

Q consists almost entirely of “sayings.” In this regard, it resembles the form of the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas. The few narrative portions include the story of Jesus’s temptation (Luke 4:1–13; Matt. 4:1–11) and the healing of the centurion’s servant (Luke 7:1–10; Matt. 8:5–13), but even here the emphasis is on the sayings of Jesus preserved in the narrative. There are no stories about Jesus’s birth or baptism, and, remarkably, there is no passion narrative. It is generally thought that the original order of the sayings is better preserved in Luke than in Matthew.

Types of Sayings

Richard Edwards finds three types of sayings interwoven in the Q material:

Wisdom sayings are aphorisms that provide insight into how things really are or perhaps offer recommendations for life based on these observations:

- “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matt. 6:21; Luke 12:34).
- “Do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows” (Matt. 10:31; Luke 12:7).

Prophetic sayings are announcements that proclaim the judgment of God or perhaps call for a particular response in light of that judgment:

- “The kingdom of God has come near to you” (Matt. 10:7; Luke 10:9).
- “Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it” (Matt. 10:39; Luke 17:33).

Eschatological sayings reflect the view that the future is of primary importance and that the end of the age is rapidly approaching:

- “You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour” (Matt. 24:44; Luke 12:40).
- “As it was in the days of Noah, so too it will be in the days of the Son of Man” (Matt. 24:37; Luke 17:26).

These types of sayings overlap (e.g., wisdom sayings may also be eschatological), but the categories do identify the streams of tradition important for an understanding of Q.

Recensions

John Kloppenborg and other scholars have suggested that Q might have gone through two or three editions before assuming the form to which Matthew and Luke had access. According to this theory, the wisdom sayings were part of the original version of Q but the eschatological sayings were not. This theory, again, is regarded as highly speculative.

Theology

The Locus of Salvation Is the Parousia, Not the Cross

In Q, the death of Jesus is perceived only as a martyrdom, not as an atonement or sacrifice for sin. In fact, there is no mention of the cross, only allusions that imply that Jesus suffers the fate of the prophets (and of John the Baptist). Jesus saves people not by dying for them but rather by inaugurating God's kingdom and granting fellowship in this kingdom to those who are faithful. This will occur shortly, at the final judgment, over which Jesus will preside as the glorified Son of Man.

Discipleship Takes the Form of Itinerant Radicalism

True discipleship, according to the Q sayings, consists of being like Jesus (cf. Luke 6:40). This means, among other things, that disciples

are expected to forgo domicile, family, and possessions. Just as the Son of Man had nowhere to lay his head (Matt. 8:20; Luke 9:58), so his disciples are called to leave their homes and families, renounce all worldly security, and devote their lives entirely to the kingdom of God.

Community

Some scholars speak loosely of a “Q community,” by which they mean early followers of Jesus who used this document as their primary Christian text. Such people might be characterized as believing that they live at the very end of time, guided by the words of Jesus and totally dependent on God for sustenance. They view their mission as a continuation of the ministry of Jesus on earth. They have collected the sayings of their coming judge to serve as a guide for living in the last days. In addition to collecting and repeating these sayings, they continue to proclaim the dawn of God’s kingdom through inspired prophets who speak in Jesus’s name.

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5.29

Contents of Q: Material in Matthew and Luke but Not in Mark (Box 5.11)

Preaching of John the Baptist	Luke 3:7–9	Matt. 3:7–10
Temptation of Jesus	Luke 4:1–13	Matt. 4:1–11
Beatitudes	Luke 6:20–23	Matt. 5:3–12
Love for enemies	Luke 6:27–36	Matt. 5:39–48; 7:12
On judging others	Luke 6:37–42	Matt. 7:1–5; 10:24; 15:14
On bearing fruit	Luke 6:43–45	Matt. 7:15–20
Parable of two builders	Luke 6:47–49	Matt. 7:24–27
Healing of a centurion’s servant	Luke 7:1–10	Matt. 8:5–10, 13
John the Baptist questions Jesus	Luke 7:18–35	Matt. 11:2–19
The would-be disciples	Luke 9:57–60	Matt. 8:19–22
Jesus’s missionary discourse	Luke 10:2–16	Matt. 9:37–38; 10:9–15; 11:21–23
Thanksgiving to the Father	Luke 10:21–24	Matt. 11:25–27; 13:16–17
The Lord’s Prayer	Luke 11:2–4	Matt. 6:9–13
Asking and receiving	Luke 11:9–13	Matt. 7:7–11
Jesus identified with Beelzebul	Luke 11:14–23	Matt. 12:22–30
Return of an evil spirit	Luke 11:24–26	Matt. 12:43–45
The sign of Jonah	Luke 11:29–32	Matt. 12:38–42
On light	Luke 11:33–36	Matt. 5:15; 6:22–23
Woe to the Pharisees	Luke 11:37–52	Matt. 23:4–7, 13–36
Fear of humans and God	Luke 12:2–12	Matt. 10:19, 26–33; 12:32
Do not worry about life	Luke 12:22–34	Matt. 6:19–21, 25–33
Be ready for the master’s return	Luke 12:39–46	Matt. 24:43–51
Divisions in the family	Luke 12:51–53	Matt. 10:34–36
Signs of the times	Luke 12:54–56	Matt. 16:2–3
Settle out of court	Luke 12:57–59	Matt. 5:25–26
Parable of leaven	Luke 13:20–21	Matt. 13:33
The narrow door	Luke 13:23–30	Matt. 7:13–14, 22–23; 8:11–12
Lament over Jerusalem	Luke 13:34–35	Matt. 23:37–39
Parable of the banquet	Luke 14:15–24	Matt. 22:1–14
Carrying the cross	Luke 14:26–27	Matt. 10:37–38

Parable of the lost sheep	Luke 15:1–7	Matt. 18:12–14
On serving two masters	Luke 16:13	Matt. 6:24
Role of the law and prophets	Luke 16:16–17	Matt. 5:18; 11:13
Rebuking and forgiving sin	Luke 17:1–6	Matt. 18:6–7, 15, 20–22
The day of the Son of Man	Luke 17:23–27, 33–37	Matt. 24:17–18, 26–28, 37–41
Parable of the talents	Luke 19:11–27	Matt. 25:14–30

5.30

Material Unique to Matthew's Gospel (Box 6.1)

This corresponds to what scholars sometimes refer to as the “M” material.

Genealogy of Jesus (from Abraham)	1:2–17
Birth of Jesus (with focus on Joseph)	1:18–25
Visit of the magi	2:1–12
Flight to Egypt	2:13–21
On fulfilling the law	5:17–20
The antitheses	5:21–24, 27–28, 33–38, 43
On practicing piety	6:1–15, 16–18
Pearls before swine	7:6
Mission limited to Israel	10:5–6
Invitation to rest	11:28–30
Parables: weeds, treasure, pearl, net	13:24–30, 36–52
Peter tries to walk on water	14:28–31
Blessing of Peter	16:17–19
Peter pays the temple tax	17:24–27
Recovering the sinful member	18:15–20
Peter asks about forgiveness	18:21–22
Parable of unforgiving servant	18:23–35
Parable of laborers in vineyard	20:1–16
Parable of two sons	21:28–32
Prohibition of titles	23:7–12
Denunciations of Pharisees	23:15–22
Parable of bridesmaids	25:1–13
Description of last judgment	25:31–46
Death of Judas	27:3–10
Pilate washes his hands	27:24–25
Resuscitation of saints	27:52–53
Guard at the tomb	27:62–66; 28:11–15
The Great Commission	28:16–20

5.31

Material Unique to Luke’s Gospel (Box 8.1)

This corresponds to what scholars sometimes refer to as the “L” material.

Dedication to Theophilus	1:1–4
Promised birth of John	1:5–25
Announcement of Jesus’s birth to Mary	1:26–38
Mary’s visit to Elizabeth	1:39–56
Birth of John the Baptist	1:57–80
Birth of Jesus (with shepherds, manger)	2:1–20
Presentation of infant Jesus in temple	2:21–38
Childhood visit to Jerusalem	2:41–52
John’s reply to questions	3:10–14
Genealogy of Jesus (to Adam)	3:23–38
Good news to the poor	4:14–23, 25–30
Miraculous catch of fish	5:1–11
Raising of widow’s son at Nain	7:11–17
Encounter with homeless woman	7:36–50
Parable of two debtors	7:40–43
Ministering women	8:1–3
Rejection by Samaritan village	9:51–56
Return of the seventy missionaries	10:17–20
Parable of good Samaritan	10:29–37
Mary and Martha	10:38–42
Parable of friend at midnight	11:5–8
Parable of rich fool	12:13–21
Parable of severe and light beatings	12:47–48
Parable of barren tree	13:1–9
Healing of crippled woman	13:10–17
Healing of man with dropsy	14:1–6
Two parables for guests and hosts	14:7–14
Counting the cost (two parables)	14:28–33
Parable of lost coin	15:8–10
Parable of prodigal son	15:11–32

Parable of shrewd manager	16:1–12
Parable of rich man and Lazarus	16:19–31
Cleansing of ten lepers	17:11–19
Parable of widow and judge	18:1–8
Parable of Pharisee and tax collector	18:9–14
Story of Zacchaeus	19:1–10
Jesus weeps over Jerusalem	19:41–44
Reason for Peter's denial	22:31–32
Two swords	22:35–38
Jesus before Herod	23:6–12
Pilate declares Jesus innocent	23:13–16
Sayings associated with Jesus's death	23:28–31, 34, 43, 46
Jesus appears on road to Emmaus	24:13–35
Jesus appears to disciples	24:36–49
Jesus's ascension	24:50–53

5.32

Material Unique to Mark's Gospel (Box 7.4)

- parable of seed growing secretly (4:26–29)
- healing of man who is deaf and mute (7:31–37)
- healing of blind man of Bethsaida (8:22–26)
- sayings on salt (9:49, 50b)
- flight of young man in the garden (14:51–52)

5.33

Expanding Mark: How Matthew and Luke Arranged Their Gospels

The Gospel of Mark tells the story of Jesus in two major phases:

1. the story of Jesus's adult life and ministry (1:1–10:52)
2. the story of Jesus's passion—the events leading up to and including his arrest, crucifixion, and resurrection (11:1–16:8)

According to the Two-Source Hypothesis, Matthew and Luke both had copies of Mark's Gospel and when they produced their Gospels they added material from Q and other sources (material that we call M when it was used by Matthew, and L when it was used by Luke).

But as these two evangelists went about expanding Mark, each of them had to ask, "Where should I put the additional material?"

Some decisions were obvious:

- genealogies and birth stories were added to the beginning (Matt. 1–2; Luke 1–2)
- resurrection stories were added at the end (Matt. 28:11–20; Luke 24:13–52).

All of that material would come from M and L. But according to the Two-Source Hypothesis, Matthew and Luke also had copies of Q,

which reported the teaching of Jesus, and they also had other traditions regarding things that Jesus had said or done.

They probably did not know the chronology for any of this material—*when* Jesus had said or done these things—so there was no obvious place where the material should go.

- Matthew decided to break up the story of Jesus’s ministry by having him deliver five long speeches or sermons (chaps. 5–7; 10; 13; 18; 24–25).
- Luke decided to put most of the extra material into a new portion of the narrative, a midsection that relates a long journey of Jesus to Jerusalem (9:51–19:44).

One consequence of these organizing techniques is that Jesus’s teaching is set in different contexts in these two Gospels.

- In Matthew’s Gospel, the teaching of Jesus occurs in a somewhat academic context akin to a *classroom*: Jesus is the rabbi, instructing his disciples in thematic lessons.
- In Luke’s Gospel, discipleship seems more like an immersion experience, or learning “on the job.” Jesus takes his disciples with him on a trip, and they learn from what he says and does along the way.

5.34

Evidence to Support the Farrer Theory

The Synoptic Puzzle

Analysis of parallel passages in the Synoptic Gospels yields the following data:

- A large amount of parallel material is found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.
- A large amount of parallel material is found in Matthew and Luke but not Mark.
- Some parallel material is found in Matthew and Mark but not Luke.
- A small amount of parallel material is found in Luke and Mark but not Matthew.

The question of how to explain these relationships is called the “Synoptic Puzzle” (or the “Synoptic Problem”).

The Farrer Theory

- Mark was written first.
- Matthew was written second, using Mark as a source.
- Luke was written third, using Matthew and Mark as sources.

The following points are often cited by supporters of the Farrer Theory as evidence for the validity of that hypothesis.

Evidence That Matthew and Luke Used Mark as a Source

The significant overlap of material between Mark and the other two Gospels suggests either (1) Mark used Matthew and/or Luke as a source, or (2) both Matthew and Luke used Mark. The latter seems more likely for these reasons:

- Omission of Markan material from Matthew and Luke is more explicable than omission of Matthean and Lukan material from Mark.

Matthew and Luke may omit Mark's reference to being "salted with fire" (Mark 9:49) because the expression is not easy to understand, or they may omit Mark's story of the fleeing young man (14:15) because it seems irrelevant. But why would Mark omit the Lord's Prayer, the Beatitudes, or the story of the good Samaritan, much less stories of Jesus's birth or of his resurrection appearances?

- Divergences in Matthew and Luke from the sequence of material in Mark are more explicable than would be divergences in Mark from the sequence of material in Matthew or Luke.

Miracles scattered throughout the first half of Mark are gathered together in Matthew 8–9 to provide a topical "miracle section" of the Gospel comparable to the

preceding “teaching section” in Matthew 5–7; the story of Jesus’s rejection in Nazareth in Mark 6:1–6 is moved forward in Luke (4:16–30) because a hometown story makes logical sense before stories of his ministry elsewhere and because the story introduces the rejection of Jesus as a programmatic theme to be developed in the narratives of the ministry that follow. If we were to assume that Mark was copying from Matthew or Luke, the rationale for his altering their sequence of such events would be difficult to comprehend.

- Minor differences of language or fact are better understood as Matthean or Lukan improvements of Mark rather than as Markan corruptions of Matthew and Luke.

Greek syntax and grammar is more colloquial in Mark and more refined in both Matthew and Luke; Herod is incorrectly called a king in Mark 6:4 but, correctly, called a tetrarch in Matthew 14:1.

- Numerous inconsistencies in Matthew and Luke are more explicable on the premise that they use Mark as a source than they would be otherwise.

Matthew actually does call Herod a king in 14:9 but a tetrarch everywhere else because at 14:9 he is following Mark (6:26) and neglected (this time) to correct his source; Luke 4:23 speaks of miracles in Capernaum that haven’t

happened yet (cf. Luke 4:31–37) because Luke bases the story in 4:16–30 on Mark 6:1–6, which in Mark’s Gospel follows the account of the Capernaum miracles (Mark 1:21–28; 2:1–12).

Evidence That Matthew and Luke Were Not Produced Independently of Each Other

Matthew and Luke contain a large amount of material in common that is not found in Mark. This implies that (1) Matthew used Luke as a source; (2) Luke used Matthew as a source (the view preferred by this theory); or (3) both Matthew and Luke used some other source. The third alternative (preferred by proponents of the Two-Source Hypothesis, who call the other source “Q”) posits that Matthew and Luke were produced independently of each other (i.e., neither Matthew nor Luke had a copy of the other author’s work).

Proponents of the Farrer Theory hold that this is unlikely for the following reasons:

- There is no mention of any such source in church tradition and no evidence of its existence—it remains a purely hypothetical construct. The simplest, default solution to the Synoptic Puzzle should be to explain parallels without recourse to a hypothetical document for which there is no external evidence.
- Matthew and Luke often agree with each other against Mark in passages common to all three Gospels.

For example, with regard to the parable of the mustard seed (Mark 4:30–32), both Matthew and Luke contain the words “a person having taken it,” “becomes a tree,” and “branches” (Matt. 13:31–32; Luke 13:18–19), although those words are not found in Mark. Likewise, in the account of Jesus’s abuse by soldiers, both Matthew and Luke have the soldiers ask Jesus, “Who is it that struck you?” (Matt. 26:68; Luke 22:64), words not found in the Markan parallel (Mark 14:65).

Presumably, these passages would not have been found in Q (even scholars who believe there was a Q source do not believe it contained these particular stories). These minor agreements could all be explained if we assume that Matthew used Mark but sometimes made minor changes to the text, and then Luke used both Mark and Matthew, sometimes sticking to Mark’s text and other times accepting the changes Matthew had made. (Hypothetically, they could also be explained if Luke used only Mark, and then Matthew used Mark and Luke—but see the next section.)

Evidence That Luke Used Matthew (Rather Than the Other Way Around)

- Luke explicitly says in the prologue of his Gospels that “others” (plural) have already written accounts of Jesus. This implies that he had at least two sources for the life and

teaching of Jesus at his disposal. Matthew makes no such comment.

- Luke's editorial changes to what he would have found in Matthew's Gospel are held to be more explicable than the changes Matthew would have had to make, supposedly, in Lukan material if the situation were reversed.

For example, Luke can be understood to have split up the long teaching sections found in Matthew's five great discourses and redistributed that material throughout his narrative; this provides the story with a more linear flow and also serves his interest in presenting much of Jesus's teaching with the context of a journey. It seems unlikely, however, that Matthew would have omitted many stories found only in Luke if he had known them (e.g., the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18:9–14, which would fit perfectly with Matthew's frequent denunciation of Pharisees).

5.35

Evidence to Support the Two-Gospel Hypothesis

The Synoptic Puzzle Analysis of parallel passages in the Synoptic Gospels yields the following data:

- A large amount of parallel material is found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.
- A large amount of parallel material is found in Matthew and Luke but not Mark.
- Some parallel material is found in Matthew and Mark but not Luke.
- A small amount of parallel material is found in Luke and Mark but not Matthew.

The question of how to explain these relationships is called the “Synoptic Puzzle” (or the “Synoptic Problem”).

The Two-Gospel Hypothesis (aka Griesbach Hypothesis)

- Matthew was written first.
- Luke was written second, using Matthew as a source.
- Mark was written third, using Matthew and Luke as sources.

The following points are often cited by supporters of the Two-Gospel Hypothesis as evidence for the validity of that theory.

Evidence for Matthean Priority

The unanimous tradition of the church from (at least) Augustine until the eighteenth century has been that Matthew's Gospel was the earliest of the four. This can be challenged only on the basis of so-called internal evidence (trying to make sense of which Gospel would be more likely to have made changes from the others). But since the external evidence unanimously identifies Matthew as first, that proposal should be the default position, unless what follows from it can be shown to be improbable (which proponents of this theory maintain is not the case).

Matthew's Gospel is the most Jewish, apparently expressive of Jewish-Christian sensibilities and attentive to Jewish-Christian concerns. This fits best in a very early context, since the church rather quickly became a primarily gentile institution. For example, Matthew's Gospel portrays Jesus as insisting that all Jewish laws should be kept by his followers (5:17–20; cf. 23:2) and in one instance he even instructs his disciples not to go to gentiles (10:5; 18:17 could also be read as implying gentiles are not currently part of the church).

Evidence That Luke Used Matthew

Matthew and Luke have an enormous amount of material in common (about two-thirds of these two Gospels overlap). If Matthew is presumed to have written first (see above), the simplest and most logical explanation for this common material would be that Luke used Matthew's Gospel as one of his sources. Luke explicitly says in

the prologue of his Gospel that “others” have already written accounts of Jesus. If Matthew’s Gospel were written first, it would likely have been one of the works to which he refers.

Hypothetically, Luke could have derived some of the material he has in common with Matthew from the Gospel of Mark, since much of that material is also found in Mark. However, even if Luke had a copy of Mark’s Gospel (which proponents of this theory deem unlikely), he still must have used Matthew as a source because Luke often agrees with Matthew against Mark in passages common to all three Gospels.

For example, in the parable of the mustard seed (Mark 4:30–32), both Matthew and Luke contain the words “a person having taken it,” “becomes a tree,” and “branches” (Matt. 13:31–32; Luke 13:18–19), although those words are not found in Mark. Likewise, in the account of Jesus’s abuse by soldiers, both Matthew and Luke have the soldiers ask Jesus, “Who is it that struck you?” (Matt. 26:68; Luke 22:64), words not found in the Markan parallel (Mark 14:65).

Hypothetically, Luke could have derived some of the material that he has in common with Matthew from some other source to which both Matthew and Luke had access (e.g., the so-called Q source proposed by some scholars). But there is no external evidence for the existence of such a document or reference to it in any church tradition.

Hypothetically, the material that Luke and Matthew have in common could be explained by Matthew having used Luke as a source rather than the other way around. But this seems unlikely because (a) church tradition holds that Matthew was written first; (b) Luke (but not Matthew) refers to previous accounts being written; and (c) Luke's editorial changes to what he would have found in Matthew's Gospel are held to be more explicable than the changes Matthew would have had to make, supposedly, in Lukan material if the situation were reversed.

For example, Luke can be understood to have split up the long teaching sections found in Matthew's five great discourses and redistributed that material throughout his narrative; this keeps the story with a more linear flow and also serves his interest in presenting much of Jesus's teaching with the context of a journey. It seems unlikely, however, that Matthew would have omitted many stories found only in Luke if he had known them (e.g., the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18:9–14, which would fit perfectly with Matthew's frequent denunciation of Pharisees).

Evidence That Mark Used Matthew and Luke as Sources

All but a handful of verses in Mark's Gospel overlap with material found in either Matthew or Luke or both. If Mark had a copy of both Matthew and Luke, two distinctive types of parallels would be explained: instances in which Mark agrees with Matthew against Luke and instances in which Mark agrees with Luke against

Matthew. Since Mark's Gospel is much shorter than either Matthew's or Luke's, the assumption of this theory is that Mark's Gospel was produced as a simultaneous conflation and condensation of the two. The desire to abbreviate would explain why many stories in Matthew and Luke are not found in Mark.

5.36

Healing Stories in the Gospels (Comments from Church Tradition)

This section focuses on a sampling of comments from early interpreters on two gospel healing stories. First, the stories:

The Healing of the Paralytic

Matthew 9:2–8	Mark 2:2–12	Luke 5:18–26
<p>And just then some people were carrying a paralyzed man lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.” 3 Then some of the scribes said to themselves, “This man is blaspheming.” 4 But Jesus, perceiving their thoughts, said, “Why do you think evil in your hearts? 5 For which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Stand up and walk’? 6 But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he then said to the paralytic—“Stand up, take your bed and go to your home.” 7 And he stood up and went to his home. 8 When the crowds saw it, they were filled with awe, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to human beings.</p>	<p>So many gathered around that there was no longer room for them, not even in front of the door; and he was speaking the word to them. 3 Then some people came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. 4 And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay. 5 When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” 6 Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, 7 “Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” 8 At once Jesus perceived in his spirit that they were discussing these questions among themselves; and he said to them, “Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? 9 Which is</p>	<p>Just then some men came, carrying a paralyzed man on a bed. They were trying to bring him in and lay him before Jesus; 19 but finding no way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the middle of the crowd in front of Jesus. 20 When he saw their faith, he said, “Friend, your sins are forgiven you.” 21 Then the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, “Who is this who is speaking blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?” 22 When Jesus perceived their questionings, he answered them, “Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? 23 Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Stand up and walk’? 24 But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the one who was</p>

	<p>easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Stand up and take your mat and walk’? 10 But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the paralytic— 11 “I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home.” 12 And he stood up, and immediately took the mat and went out before all of them; so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this!”</p>	<p>paralyzed—“I say to you, stand up and take your bed and go to your home.” 25 Immediately he stood up before them, took what he had been lying on, and went to his home, glorifying God. 26 Amazement seized all of them, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, “We have seen strange things today.”</p>
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Augustine (354–430):

Jesus says, “You have been a paralytic inwardly. You did not take charge of your bed. Your bed took charge of you.” (*On the Ps.* 41.4)

Peter Chrysologus (406–450):

Jesus tells the paralytic, “Take up your bed. Carry the very mat that once carried you. Change places, so that what was the proof of your sickness may now give testimony to your soundness. Your bed of pain becomes the sign of healing, its very weight the measure of the strength that has been restored to you.” (Homily 50.6)¹

The Healing of a Man with a Withered Hand

Matthew 12:9–14	Mark 3:1–6	Luke 6:6–11
He left that place and entered their synagogue;	Again he entered the synagogue, and a man	On another sabbath he entered the synagogue

<p>10 a man was there with a withered hand, and they asked him, "Is it lawful to cure on the sabbath?" so that they might accuse him. 11 He said to them, "Suppose one of you has only one sheep and it falls into a pit on the sabbath; will you not lay hold of it and lift it out? 12 How much more valuable is a human being than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the sabbath." 13 Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and it was restored, as sound as the other. 14 But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him.</p>	<p>was there who had a withered hand. 2 They watched him to see whether he would cure him on the sabbath, so that they might accuse him. 3 And he said to the man who had the withered hand, "Come forward." 4 Then he said to them, "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent. 5 He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. 6 The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.</p>	<p>and taught, and there was a man there whose right hand was withered. 7 The scribes and the Pharisees watched him to see whether he would cure on the sabbath, so that they might find an accusation against him. 8 Even though he knew what they were thinking, he said to the man who had the withered hand, "Come and stand here." He got up and stood there. 9 Then Jesus said to them, "I ask you, is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to destroy it?" 10 After looking around at all of them, he said to him, "Stretch out your hand." He did so, and his hand was restored. 11 But they were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus.</p>
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Athanasius (296–373):

In the synagogue of the Jews was a man who had a withered hand. If he was withered in his hand, the ones who stood by were withered in their minds. And they were not looking at the crippled man nor were they expecting the miraculous deed of the one who was about to work. But before doing the work, the Savior ploughed up their minds with words. For knowing the evil of the mind and its bitter depth, he first softened them up in advance with words so as to tame the wildness of their understanding, asking: "Is it permitted to do good on the sabbath or to do evil; to save a life or to destroy one?" For if he had said

to them, “Is it permitted to work?” immediately they would have said, “You are speaking contrary to the law.” Then he told them what was intended by the law, for he spoke as the One who established the laws concerning the sabbath, adding, “except this: that which will be done for the sake of a life.” Again if a person falls into a hole on a sabbath, Jews are permitted to “pull the person out. This not only applies to a person, but also an ox or a donkey. In this way the law agrees that things relating to preservation may be done, hence Jews prepare meals on the sabbath. Then he asked them about a point on which they could hardly disagree: “Is it permitted to do good?” But they did not even so much as say, “Yes,” because by then they were not in a good temper.” (Homilies 28)²

1. M. F. Toal, trans. and ed., *The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers: A Manual of Preaching, Spiritual Reading, and Meditation*. 4 vols. (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1958), 4:191.
2. Thomas C. Oden and Christopher A. Hall, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, Vol. 2, *Mark* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 37.

5.37

Gospel Miracles in a Fourth-Century Song: Hymn 9 by Prudentius

Prudentius (348–ca. 405) was a Roman Christian poet who lived in Spain and wrote numerous hymns based on biblical or theological themes. His meditation on the birth of Christ, “Of the Father’s Love Begotten,” remains a popular Christmas hymn in many churches to this day.

His best-known work may be the *Cathemerinon*, a collection of twelve lyric poems for use at different hours of the day and on Christian festivals. Of these, the most famous would be Hymn 9, which summarizes the story of Jesus in the Gospels, with emphasis on his incarnation, miracles, and passion-resurrection.

The midsection of the lengthy poem mentions several miracles of Jesus reported in the four New Testament Gospels. In lines 28–30, Prudentius describes Jesus’s turning water into wine (John 2:1–11):

In the urns the clear, cold water turns to juice of noblest vine,
And the servant, drawing from them, starts to see the generous
wine,
While the host, its savour tasting, wonders at the draught divine.¹

In lines 31–66, the hymn continues, recounting Jesus cleansing a leper (Matt. 8:2–4; Mark 1:40–42; Luke 5:12–13); healing the blind (Mark 8:22–26); calming the storm at sea (Matt. 8:23–27; Mark 4:37–

41; Luke 8:22–25); healing a woman who touches his garment (Matt. 9:20–22; Mark 5:25–34; Luke 8:43–48); raising a widow’s son from the dead (Luke 7:11–15); raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11:1–44); walking on water (Matt. 14:25; Mark 6:48–51; John 6:19); healing the insane by exorcizing demons (Matt. 8:28–43; Mark 5:1–15; Luke 8:27–35); feeding a multitude, literally and figuratively (Matt. 14:15–21; Mark 6:35–44; Luke 9:12–17; John 6:5–13); healing the deaf and the mute (Mark 7:31–37); and healing sickness and infirmity (Matt. 14:35–36; Mark 1:34).

1. Aurelius Prudentius, *The Hymns of Prudentius*, trans. R. Martin Pope (London: J. M. Dent and Co. Aldine House, 1905).

6.0

Matthew: Outline of Contents

- I. Jesus presented (1:1–4:16)
 - A. Jesus as fulfillment of end-time expectations (1:1–25)
 - 1. Jesus's ancestors recalled (1:1–17)
 - 2. Jesus's birth announced (1:18–25)
 - B. Birth of Jesus (2:1–23)
 - 1. Appearance of the magi (2:1–12)
 - 2. Jesus taken to Egypt (2:13–15)
 - 3. Slaughter of the innocents (2:16–23)
 - C. Jesus and John the Baptist (3:1–17)
 - 1. John baptizes in Judea (3:1–12)
 - 2. John baptizes Jesus (3:12–17)
 - D. Jesus tempted by Satan (4:1–11)
 - E. Jesus in Galilee (4:12–16)
- II. Jesus's ministry (4:17–16:20)
 - A. Jesus's ministry to Israel (4:17–11:1)
 - 1. Jesus calls disciples (4:17–22)
 - 2. Jesus teaches (4:23–7:29)
 - 3. Jesus does mighty deeds (8:1–9:34)

4. Jesus commissions the twelve (9:35–11:1)

B. Israel's repudiation of Jesus (11:2–16:20)

1. Israel repudiates Jesus (11:2–12:50)

2. Jesus speaks in parables (13:1–52)

3. Rejection of Jesus and the death of John the Baptist
(13:53–14:12)

4. Jesus feeds, heals, and teaches (14:13–16:12)

5. Disciples confess Jesus as Son of God (16:13–20)

III. Jesus in Jerusalem (16:21–28:20)

A. Jesus predicts his passion in Jerusalem and journeys to it
(16:21–21:11)

B. Jesus in the temple (21:12–23:39)

C. Jesus speaks about end times (24:1–25:46)

D. Jesus's trial and crucifixion (26:1–27:66)

E. Jesus rises from the dead (28:1–20)

Courtesy of *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, ed. Mark Allan Powell (New York: HarperCollins, 2011).

6.1

Content Summary: Expanded Overview of the Gospel of Matthew

A genealogy of Jesus is presented in three sets of “fourteen generations,” emphasizing that Jesus is descended from Abraham and David. (1:1–17)

The story of Jesus’s birth is told from the perspective of Joseph: an angel tells him that Mary (to whom he is betrothed) is pregnant from the Holy Spirit and that he is to name the child “Jesus” because the child will “save his people from their sins.” (1:18–25)

Magi are guided by a star to Bethlehem, where they worship Jesus and offer him gifts; Herod murders babies in Bethlehem in an unsuccessful attempt to kill the newborn Messiah. (2:1–23)

John the Baptist preaches in the wilderness and testifies to the one who is to come after him. Initially reluctant to baptize Jesus, John consents to “fulfill all righteousness.” The Spirit comes upon Jesus, and a voice from heaven identifies him as God’s Son. (3:1–17)

Satan presents Jesus with three temptations in the wilderness. (4:1–11)

In fulfillment of Scripture, Jesus begins a ministry of teaching, preaching, and healing, marked by the message “Repent, for the

kingdom of heaven has come near.” He calls four fishermen to be his disciples: Simon Peter, Andrew, James, and John. (4:12–25)

Jesus preaches the Sermon on the Mount (5:1–7:29), which includes (among other material):

- the Beatitudes
- sayings about “salt of the earth” and “light of the world”
- declaration that Jesus has come to fulfill the law and the prophets
- importance of keeping even the least of the commandments (every letter, every stroke)
- seven “antitheses”: “you have heard it said . . . but I say to you”
- warnings against practicing piety to be seen by others
- the Lord’s Prayer
- no one can serve two masters (God and mammon)
- do not be anxious: God cares for the birds of the air and the lilies of the field
- seek first the kingdom of God
- do not judge, lest you be judged; first take the log out of your own eye
- do not throw pearls before swine

- ask, and it will be given; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened
- the Golden Rule: do to others as you would have them do to you
- contrast between the narrow gate to life and the wide road to destruction
- beware of wolves in sheep's clothing
- not everyone who calls Jesus "Lord" will enter the kingdom of heaven
- parable of the house built on rock and the house built on sand

Jesus cleanses a leper who comes to him in faith and worship. (8:1–4)

Jesus heals the servant of a centurion in Capernaum. He praises the faith of this gentile who knows that Jesus has the authority to speak a word and heal his servant from a distance. (8:5–13)

Jesus cures Simon's mother-in-law of a fever and also heals many others, fulfilling prophecies of Scripture. (8:14–17)

Jesus encounters two would-be disciples: a presumptuous scribe to whom he says, "The Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head," and a procrastinating disciple to whom he says, "Let the dead bury the dead." (8:18–22)

Jesus stills a storm at sea and rebukes his fearful disciples for being people of little faith. (8:23–27)

Jesus meets two demoniacs in a cemetery and casts the demons out of them and into pigs, which run into the water and drown. (8:28–34)

Jesus heals a paralytic after first telling the man that his sins are forgiven; some scribes regard the declaration of forgiveness as blasphemy. (9:1–8)

Jesus calls Matthew the tax collector to follow him. To the chagrin of religious leaders, he eats with Matthew and other tax collectors. He quotes the Scripture “I desire mercy not sacrifice” and says, “I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.” (9:9–13)

Jesus explains to disciples of John the Baptist why his disciples don’t fast: they are like wedding guests, who cannot mourn as long as “the bridegroom” is still with them. (9:14–17)

Jesus goes to heal the daughter of a prominent man. Along the way, a woman with hemorrhages touches the hem of his garment and is healed. The man’s daughter dies, but Jesus raises her from the dead. (9:18–26)

Jesus heals two blind men, telling them to keep it secret, but they spread the news. (9:27–31)

Jesus heals a mute demoniac, but the Pharisees say that he does this by the ruler of demons. (9:32–34)

Jesus continues to heal many people and then appoints twelve apostles and sends them out to preach the kingdom, cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, and cast out demons. His instructions to them describe persecutions that are to come, the need for radical faithfulness, and the promise of rewards for those who welcome them. (9:35–10:42)

Jesus responds to a question from John the Baptist regarding whether Jesus is the one who was to come and then speaks to the crowd about John: “a prophet and more than a prophet.” (11:1–15)

Jesus upbraids those who have rejected both his ministry and that of John. He thanks God for hiding the truth from the “wise and intelligent” and offers an invitation to all who are weary to come to him and find rest: “My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (11:16–30)

Jesus confronts Pharisees who criticize his disciples for picking grain on the Sabbath. The Pharisees are condemning the guiltless, for “the Son of man is lord of the sabbath.” (12:1–8)

In a synagogue on the Sabbath, Jesus heals a man who has a withered hand, provoking the Pharisees to plot to destroy Jesus. (12:9–14)

Jesus’s continued healings fulfill Isaiah’s prophecy about the servant of the Lord. (12:15–21)

Jesus heals a blind and mute demoniac, and the Pharisees claim that Jesus casts out demons by the power of Beelzebul. Jesus indicates that their claim is ridiculous because a house divided against itself cannot stand, and he says that these leaders are blaspheming the Holy Spirit (an unforgivable sin). (12:22–37)

Scribes and Pharisees want to see a sign from Jesus, but he says that no sign will be given except the sign of Jonah. They are like a man possessed by a demon that goes out and then returns with seven others. (12:38–45)

Jesus's mother and brothers come to see him, but he says that his disciples and whoever does the will of God are his true "brother and sister and mother." (12:46–50)

Jesus tells seven parables about the kingdom of heaven, including those of the sower and of the wheat and weeds, both of which have allegorical explanations. The kingdom is also like a mustard seed, yeast, a treasure in a field, a pearl of great price, and a dragnet. (13:1–53)

Jesus teaches in the synagogue in Nazareth. The people take offense at him, prompting him to say, "Prophets are not without honor except in their hometown." (13:54–58)

Jesus's ministry attracts the attention of Herod, who has beheaded John the Baptist. The daughter of his wife, Herodias, had danced for Herod; he offered to give her anything she wanted, and

Herodias told her to ask for “the head of John the Baptist on a platter.” (14:1–12)

Jesus feeds over five thousand people with five pieces of bread and two fish. (14:13–21)

Jesus walks on water and invites Peter to walk on water as well. (14:22–33)

Jesus heals many people, including all those who touch the fringe of his garment. (14:34–36)

Jesus’s disciples are criticized for eating with unwashed hands. He responds by attacking the critics for their own hypocrisy and then by explaining that true defilement lies within the heart. (15:1–20)

Jesus refuses to heal the daughter of a Canaanite woman, claiming that he has been sent only to the lost sheep of Israel. When she says, “Even dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table,” he relents in response to her great faith. (15:21–28)

Jesus feeds a crowd of four thousand people with seven loaves and a few fish. (15:29–39)

Pharisees and Sadducees ask to see a sign from Jesus, but he refuses. (16:1–4)

Jesus’s disciples misunderstand a reference that he makes to leaven and become worried that they don’t have enough bread. He reminds them of the miraculous feedings and explains “leaven” is

a metaphor for the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

(16:5–12)

At Caesarea Philippi, Peter identifies Jesus as “the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Jesus says that Peter is the rock on which he will build his church, and that he will give Peter the keys to the kingdom to bind and loose on earth what will be bound and loosed in heaven. (16:13–20)

Jesus tells the disciples that he will be crucified, and Peter objects.

Jesus rebukes him, saying, “Get behind me Satan!” and then says that those who want to be his followers must deny themselves and bear the cross. (16:21–26)

Jesus says the Son of Man will come with angels in glory and that some of those standing with him will not taste death before they see the Son of Man come in his kingdom. (16:27–28)

Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up on a mountain with him and is transfigured before them, appearing with Elijah and Moses in dazzling glory. A voice from heaven says, “This is my Son, the Beloved . . . listen to him!” (17:1–8)

Jesus explains to the disciples that a prophecy regarding the return of Elijah has been fulfilled by the coming of John the Baptist. (17:9–13)

After his disciples are unable to do so, Jesus casts a demon out of a boy who has seizures. He tells his disciples that they fail because

of their little faith, but with faith as small as a mustard seed they can move mountains. (17:14–21)

Jesus's disciples are distressed when he predicts his passion a second time. (17:22–23)

Jesus pays the temple tax by having Peter catch a fish that has a coin in its mouth. (17:24–27)

Jesus addresses a discourse on community matters (18:1–35) to his competitive disciples:

- welcome children as the greatest in the kingdom
- take extreme measures to keep yourself from sin (cut off your hand, pluck out your eye)
- parable of the lost sheep: shepherd leaves the flock to find the lost one
- how to confront a sinner: alone, then with others, then before the whole church
- how many times to forgive? not seven, but seventy-seven
- parable of the unmerciful servant: terrible judgment awaits those who accept God's forgiveness and then withhold forgiveness from others

As he travels, Jesus is followed by large crowds, and he heals them. (19:1–2)

Pharisees test Jesus with a question about divorce. He says that remarriage after divorce for any reason other than unchastity constitutes adultery. This teaching, like celibacy, can be accepted only by those to whom it is given. (19:3–12)

Jesus's disciples try to prevent people from bringing children to him, but Jesus says, "Let the little children come to me . . . to such as these belongs the kingdom of God." (19:13–15)

A rich man goes away sad after Jesus tells him to give up all his possessions. Jesus says that it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God. (19:16–26)

Jesus assures his disciples, who left everything to follow him, that they will receive abundant rewards and that they will sit on twelve thrones judging the tribes of Israel. (19:27–30)

Jesus tells the parable of workers in the vineyard: hired at different hours, all receive the same wage. (20:1–16)

After Jesus predicts his passion a third time, the mother of James and John asks that her sons be seated at his left and right in glory. The other disciples become indignant at this, and Jesus says that greatness is achieved through service. He says, "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many." (20:17–28)

Jesus heals two blind men on the road outside Jericho. (20:29–34)

Jesus enters Jerusalem riding a donkey and a colt, as a crowd of people shout “Hosanna” and strew clothing and palm branches in his path. (21:1–11)

Jesus overturns the tables of money changers and calls the Jerusalem temple “a den of robbers.” Then he heals people in the temple while children sing his praises. (21:12–17)

Jesus curses a fig tree, and it withers at once. He tells his disciples that this exemplifies the power of prayer: “Whatever you ask for in prayer with faith, you will receive.” (21:18–22)

Religious leaders ask Jesus by what authority he is acting, but he refuses to answer them because they will not respond to his own question regarding the baptism of John. (21:23–27)

Jesus tells the parable of two sons: one says that he will work in the vineyard but doesn’t; the other says that he won’t but does. (21:28–32)

Jesus tells the parable of the wicked tenants: the owner of a vineyard sends two groups of servants, and then finally his son, to collect fruit from tenants, who beat the servants and kill the son. (21:33–46)

Jesus tells the parable of the wedding banquet: people kill the servants who bring them invitations, so the king destroys them and fills the hall with others, good and bad; one man doesn’t have

a wedding garment, and so he is thrown into the outer darkness.

(22:1–14)

Pharisees test Jesus, asking him whether it is lawful to pay taxes to

Caesar. He says, “Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” (22:15–22)

Sadducees test Jesus with a question: If a woman was married to

seven men in this life, whose wife will she be in the resurrection?

He replies that there is no marriage in heaven, for people are like angels. (22:23–33)

A lawyer tests Jesus by asking which commandment is first of all.

Jesus replies that the first is to love God, and that the second is to love one’s neighbor as oneself. (22:34–40)

Jesus stumps the religious leaders by asking them how the Messiah

can be the son of David when David calls him “Lord.” (22:41–46)

Jesus warns his disciples about the scribes and Pharisees, who sit

on Moses’s seat but do not practice what they preach. His

followers are to shun honorific titles and ostentation. (23:1–12)

Jesus speaks seven “woes” against the scribes and Pharisees, who

are hypocrites and blind fools. They will not escape being

sentenced to hell. (23:13–36)

Jesus laments the fate of Jerusalem, which he wanted to protect as

a mother hen protects her brood. (23:37–39)

Jesus tells his disciples that the Jerusalem temple will be destroyed.

Then, on the Mount of Olives, he launches into a long discourse on the end times, emphasizing the terrible persecutions to come and urging people to be ready at all times. (24:1–44)

Jesus tells three eschatological parables: the faithful and wise servant, the wise and foolish bridesmaids, and the slaves given talents. In each case, wise and decisive action is contrasted with lax ineptitude, which brings terrible judgment. (24:45–25:30)

Jesus says that at the final judgment, the Son of Man will separate the nations like sheep from goats and will admit the former to everlasting life and condemn the latter to everlasting punishment. The verdict will be based on how they treated “the least of those who are members of my family.” (25:31–46)

Jesus predicts his passion again. Meanwhile, the chief priests and the elders plot to have him killed (26:1–5).

At the home of Simon the leper in Bethany, an unnamed woman anoints Jesus for burial. His disciples consider it a waste of ointment, but he says that what she has done must be told throughout the whole world in remembrance of her. (26:6–13)

Judas agrees to betray Jesus, just before the disciples and Jesus eat the Passover meal together. Jesus identifies the bread and wine as his body and blood given “for the forgiveness of sins.” He predicts his betrayal, and they go out to Gethsemane, where he

prays that, if possible, God remove the cup from him. He is arrested, and his disciples desert him. (26:14–56)

Taken to Caiaphas, Jesus is put on trial before a group of priests who decide that he deserves death and turn him over to Pilate. Meanwhile, Peter denies three times that he is a disciple of Jesus. (26:57–27:2)

Judas regrets having betrayed Jesus and returns the thirty pieces of silver that had been paid to him. Then he goes out and hangs himself. (27:3–10)

A crowd calls for Jesus to be crucified after Pilate gives them the choice of releasing Jesus or a notorious prisoner, Barabbas. Pilate washes his hands of Jesus's blood, and the people cry out, "His blood be on us and on our children!" (27:11–26)

Jesus is mocked by soldiers who crown him with thorns and compel Simon of Cyrene to carry Jesus's cross to Golgotha, where Jesus is crucified. Mocked on the cross, he cries out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" before he dies. (27:27–50)

At Jesus's death, the curtain in the temple tears and an earthquake splits the ground, opening many tombs. Many dead saints leave the tombs, go into Jerusalem, and appear to people in the days following Jesus's resurrection. (27:51–53)

The centurion at the cross declares, "Truly, this man was God's son!" (27:54)

Many women are said to have been observing the crucifixion from a distance, including Mary Magdalene, another Mary, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee. Although they are mentioned for the first time here, we are told that they have been following Jesus since his early ministry in Galilee. (27:55–56)

A rich man, Joseph of Arimathea, provides a tomb for Jesus's burial, which the women witness. Meanwhile, the religious leaders place a guard at the tomb. (27:57–66)

After the Sabbath, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary come to the tomb. There is a great earthquake, and an angel rolls away the stone to show them the tomb is already empty and Jesus is risen. Then they see Jesus himself and worship him. (28:1–10)

The chief priests bribe the soldiers at the tomb to tell people that Jesus's disciples came at night and stole his body. (27:11–15)

Jesus gives the Great Commission to his eleven disciples: they are to make disciples of all nations by baptizing and teaching them, and Jesus promises to be with them always. (28:16–20)

6.2

Material Unique to Matthew's Gospel (Box 6.1)

This corresponds to what scholars sometimes refer to as the “M” material.

Genealogy of Jesus (from Abraham)	1:2–17
Birth of Jesus (with focus on Joseph)	1:18–25
Visit of the magi	2:1–12
Flight to Egypt	2:13–21
On fulfilling the law	5:17–20
The antitheses	5:21–24, 27–28, 33–38, 43
On practicing piety	6:1–15, 16–18
Pearls before swine	7:6
Mission limited to Israel	10:5–6
Invitation to rest	11:28–30
Parables: weeds, treasure, pearl, net	13:24–30, 36–52
Peter tries to walk on water	14:28–31
Blessing of Peter	16:17–19
Peter pays the temple tax	17:24–27
Recovering the sinful member	18:15–20
Peter asks about forgiveness	18:21–22
Parable of unforgiving servant	18:23–35
Parable of laborers in vineyard	20:1–16
Parable of two sons	21:28–32
Prohibition of titles	23:7–12
Denunciations of Pharisees	23:15–22
Parable of bridesmaids	25:1–13
Description of last judgment	25:31–46
Death of Judas	27:3–10
Pilate washes his hands	27:24–25
Resuscitation of saints	27:52–53
Guard at the tomb	27:62–66; 28:11–15
The Great Commission	28:16–20

6.3

Passages from Mark Omitted by Matthew

According to the dominant source theories, the author of Matthew's Gospel drew much of his material from the Gospel of Mark but chose not to use certain passages.

Mark	
1:21–27	Exorcism of unclean spirit from man in synagogue
1:35–38	Morning prayer interrupted
4:26–29*	Parable of seed growing secretly (“automatic growth”)
7:31–37*	Healing of deaf and dumb man
8:22–26*	Healing of blind man of Bethsaida
9:38–40	Disciples rebuke an exorcist who does not follow them
12:41–44	Story of the widow's mite
*14:51–52	Flight of young man in the garden
*Omitted also by Luke.	

6.4

Parallels between the Sermon on the Mount and the New Testament Epistles

Several passages in the Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew's Gospel have close parallels to texts in New Testament epistles. The following comparisons are especially noteworthy:

Matthew	Epistles
5:10	1 Peter 3:14
5:11–12	1 Peter 4:13–14
5:16	1 Peter 2:12
5:31–32	1 Corinthians 7:10–11
5:34–37	James 5:12
5:39	Romans 12:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:15; 1 Peter 3:9
5:44	Romans 12:14; 1 Corinthians 4:12
5:48	1 Peter 1:15
6:19–20	James 5:1–3
6:25	Philippians 4:6
7:1–2	Romans 2:1–3; 14:10
7:7	James 1:5; 1 John 5:14–15
7:16b	James 3:12
7:21–27	Romans 2:13; James 1:22

Such parallels are striking because the authors of these epistles are not thought to have had access to either Matthew's Gospel or the Q source. The common suggestion, therefore, is that such sayings were attributed to Jesus via oral tradition in various sectors of the church.

6.5

Women in the Gospel of Matthew

References to Women Found only in Matthew

Passage (Source)	Brief Description
Matt. 1:3, 5, 6	Genealogy of Jesus: “. . . and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar. . . and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth . . . and David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah.”
Matt. 1:16	Genealogy of Jesus: “. . . Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born.”
Matt. 1:18–25	Birth of Jesus: “When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit . . . ‘Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son.’”
Matt. 2:11	Magi’s visit: “On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage.”
Matt. 5:27–28	Sermon on the Mount, on adultery: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”
Matt. 5:31–32	Sermon on the Mount, on divorce: “It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.” (cf. Mark 10:2–12)
Matt. 14:21	Feeding of the 5,000: “Those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.”
Matt. 15:38	Feeding of the 4,000: “Those who had eaten were four thousand men, besides women and children.”
Matt. 18:25	Parable of the Unforgiving Servant: “. . . his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made.”
Matt. 21:5	Jesus’s entrance into Jerusalem: “Tell the

	daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” (cf. Isa. 62:11; Zech. 9:9; John 12:15)
Matt. 25:1–13	Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids and Their Lamps
Matt. 27:19	Pilate’s wife: “While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, ‘Have nothing to do with that innocent man, for today I have suffered a great deal because of a dream about him.’”

References to Women Found in Both Matthew and Luke

(Possibly Derived from the “Q” Source)

Ref.	Brief Description	Cross Reference
Matt. 10:35	Divisions within households: “For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.”	Luke 12:53
Matt. 10:37	Conditions of discipleship: “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.”	Luke 14:26
Matt. 11:11	Jesus speaks about John the Baptist: “Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”	Luke 7:28
Matt. 12:42	Seeking signs: “The Queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to listen to the wisdom of Solomon, and see, something greater than Solomon is here!”	Luke 11:31
Matt. 13:33	New parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.”	Luke 13:20–21
Matt. 23:37b	Lament over Jerusalem: “How often have I desired to gather your	Luke 13:34

	children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!”	
Matt. 24:38	Apocalyptic discourse: “For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark.”	Luke 17:26–27
Matt. 24:41	Apocalyptic discourse: “Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left.”	Luke 17:35

References to Women Found in Matthew and Mark

(Sometimes also Luke and/or John)—Probably Derived by

Matthew from Redaction of Mark’s Gospel

Matt.	Brief Description	Mark	Luke	John
8:14–15	Healing of Simon’s mother-in-law	1:29–31	4:38–39	
12:46–50	Concern of Jesus’s family: mother and brothers	3:19b–21, 31–35	8:19–21	
9:18–19, 23–26	The daughter of Jairus	5:21–24, 35–43	8:40–42, 49–56	
9:20–22	A woman with a flow of blood	5:25–34	8:43–48	
13:55–56	Jesus is called “Son of Mary”; ref. to his sisters	6:3		[6:42]*
14:3–12	John the Baptist’s death: Herodias and her daughter	6:17–29	[3:19–20]	
15:21–28	The Syrophenician woman’s daughter	7:24–30		
19:3–12	On divorce	10:2–12	[16:18]	
19:19	Jesus quotes the Decalogue: “Honor your father and mother”	10:19	18:20	
19:29	“Everyone who	10:29–30	18:29	

	has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields, for my sake”			
22:23–33	The case of a woman who had seven husbands	12:18–27	20:27–40	
24:19	“Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing infants in those days!”	13:17	21:23–24	
26:6–13	Anointing in Bethany: anonymous woman	14:3–9	[7:36–50]	12:1–8
26:69–72	Peter’s denials: the serving girl	14:66–70	22:56–57	18:17
27:55–56	Women at the cross: Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James and Joses, and Salome	15:40–41	23:49	19:25–27
27:61	Women see Jesus buried	15:47	23:55–56	
28:1–8	Women go to Jesus’s tomb	16:1–8	24:1–10	20:1–2, 11–13
28:9–10	[Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene / women]	[16:9–11]	24:10–11	20:14–18

*Brackets indicate a less exact or direct reference.

6.6

Worship in the Gospel of Matthew

Events

The magi worship (*proskyneō*) Jesus as one born King of the Jews (2:11; cf. 2:2).

A leper worships (*proskyneō*) Jesus, desiring to be cleansed (8:2).

Crowds glorify (*doxazō*) God after Jesus heals a paralytic (9:8).

A ruler worships (*proskyneō*) Jesus, wanting him to restore his daughter to life (9:18).

Jesus gives thanks (*exomologeō*) to the Father for revealing to infants what is hidden from the wise and understanding (11:25).

Disciples worship (*proskyneō*) Jesus as the Son of God (14:33).

A Canaanite woman worships (*proskyneō*) Jesus and asks him to heal her daughter (15:25).

A crowd glorifies (*doxazō*) the God of Israel after Jesus heals many people (15:31).

In a parable told by Jesus, a slave worships (*proskyneō*) his king and asks for patience in payment of debts (18:26).

The mother of James and John worships (*proskyneō*) Jesus and requests special positions for her sons (20:20–21).

Children offer Jesus praise (*ainos*) as the Son of David in the temple
(21:15–16).

Two women worship (*proskyneō*) the risen Jesus (28:9).

The disciples worship (*proskyneō*) the risen Jesus (28:17).

Also:

Herod falsely promises to worship (*proskyneō*) Jesus (2:8).

Jesus refuses the temptation to worship (*proskyneō*) Satan (4:9–10).

Sayings

Jesus quotes Scripture to Satan: “Worship [*proskyneō*] the Lord your
God and serve [*latreuō*] only him” (4:10).

Jesus tells his disciples: “Let your light shine before others, so that
they may see your good works and glorify [*doxazō*] your Father in
heaven” (5:16).

Jesus applies to religious leaders the Scripture that says, “This
people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me;
in vain do they worship [*sebomai*] me, teaching human precepts
as doctrines” (15:8–9).

6.7

Matthew in the Revised Common Lectionary

Text	Content	Series	Liturgical Occasion	Calendar Date
1:18–25	Birth of Jesus	A	Advent 4	1 Sunday before Dec. 25
2:1–12	Visit of magi	A, B, C	Epiphany Day	Jan. 6
2:13–23	Massacre of infants	A	Christmas 1	1 Sunday after Dec. 25
3:1–12	Ministry of John the Baptist	A	Advent 2	3 Sundays before Dec. 25
3:13–17	Baptism of Jesus	A	Epiphany 1	Jan. 7–13
4:1–11	Temptation of Jesus	A	Lent 1	6 Sundays before Easter
4:12–23	Call of disciples	A	Epiphany 3	Jan. 21–27
5:1–12	Beatitudes	A	Epiphany 4	Jan. 29–Feb 3
5:1–12	Beatitudes	A	All Saints' Day	Nov. 1
5:13–20	Salt, light, righteousness	A	Epiphany 5	Feb. 4–10
5:21–37	Antitheses	A	Epiphany 6	Feb. 11–17
5:38–48	Love for enemies	A	Epiphany 7	Feb. 18–24
6:1–6, 16–21	Practicing piety in private	A, B, C	Ash Wednesday	7 Wednesdays before Easter
6:24–34	On anxiety: birds and lilies	A	Epiphany 8	Feb. 25–March 1
6:24–34	On anxiety: birds and lilies	A	Lectionary 8	May 24–28
7:21–29	Wise and foolish builders	A	Lectionary 9	May 29–June 4
9:9–13, 18–26	Call of Matthew; two healings	A	Lectionary 10	June 5–11
9:35–10:8 (9–23)	Mission charge	A	Lectionary 11	June 12–18
10:24–39	Perseverance in persecution	A	Lectionary 12	June 19–25
10:40–42	Rewards for hospitality	A	Lectionary 13	June 26–July 2
11:2–11	Question of John the Baptist	A	Advent 3	2 Sundays before Dec. 25

11:16–19, 25–30	Thanksgiving to the Father	A	Lectionary 14	July 3–9
13:1–9, 18– 23	Parable of sower	A	Lectionary 15	July 10–16
13:24–30, 36–43	Parable of wheat and weeds	A	Lectionary 16	July 17–23
13:31–33, 44–52	Parables of the kingdom	A	Lectionary 17	July 24–30
14:13–21	Feeding of multitude	A	Lectionary 18	July 31–Aug. 6
14:22–33	Walking on water	A	Lectionary 19	Aug. 7–13
15:(10–20) 21–28	Canaanite woman and her daughter	A	Lectionary 20	Aug. 14–20
16:13–20	Peter’s confession	A	Lectionary 21	Aug. 21–27
16:21–28	First passion prediction	A	Lectionary 22	Aug. 28–Sept. 3
17:1–9	Transfiguration of Jesus	A	Transfiguration	7 Sundays before Easter
18:15–20	Confronting sinners	A	Lectionary 23	Sept. 4–10
18:21–35	Parable of unmerciful servant	A	Lectionary 24	Sept. 11–17
20:1–16	Parable of laborers in field	A	Lectionary 25	Sept. 18–24
21:23–32	Parable of two sons	A	Lectionary 26	Sept. 25–Oct. 1
21:33–46	Parable of wicked tenants	A	Lectionary 27	Oct. 2–8
22:1–14	Parable of wedding banquet	A	Lectionary 28	Oct. 9–15
22:15–22	Question about taxes	A	Lectionary 29	Oct. 16–22
22:34–46	Greatest commandment	A	Lectionary 30	Oct. 23–29
23:1–12	Proper role of leaders	A	Lectionary 31	Oct. 30–Nov. 5
24:36–44	Coming of the Son of Man	A	Advent 1	4 Sundays before Dec. 25
25:1–13	Parable of wise and foolish bridesmaids	A	Lectionary 32	Nov. 6–12
25:14–30	Parable of	A	Lectionary 33	Nov. 13–19

	talents			
25:31–46	Final judgment	A	Christ the King	Nov. 20–26
26:14–27:66 or 27:11–54	Passion of Jesus	A	Passion Sunday	1 Sunday before Easter
28:16–20	Great Commission	A	Holy Trinity	9 Sundays after Easter

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6.9

Distinctive Characteristics of Matthew's Gospel

A. Matthew likes to organize.

- three sets of fourteen generations in the genealogy (1:17)
- five great speeches (see “B” below)
- twelve fulfillment citations (see “F” below)
- ten miracles (chaps. 8–9)
- seven parables (chap. 13)
- seven woes against the scribes and Pharisees (chap. 23)

B. There are five great speeches given by Jesus in Matthew's Gospel.

- Sermon on the Mount (chaps. 5–7)
- Missionary Discourse (chap. 10)
- Parable Discourse (chap. 13)
- Community Discourse (chap. 18)
- Eschatological Discourse (chaps. 24–25)

C. Matthew likes pairs.

Double characters:

- two demoniacs (8:28–33; cf. Mark 5:1–14)
- two blind men (20:29–34; cf. Mark 10:46–52)

- two donkeys (21:1–11; cf. Mark 11:1–11)

Double stories:

- two requests for a sign (12:38–42; 16:1–4)
- two Beelzebul accusations (9:32–34; 12:22–24)
- two healings of two blind men (9:27–31; 20:29–34)

D. Matthew's Gospel has a strong Jewish character.

- “Go nowhere among the Gentiles” (10:5).
- “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (15:24).
- Jesus pays the temple tax (17:24–27).
- “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat” (23:2).
- “Pray that your flight not be . . . on a sabbath” (24:20).

E. Matthew's Gospel also displays anti-Jewish Polemic.

Castigation of Israel's religious leaders:

- “evil” (9:4; 12:34; 16:4)
- “brood of vipers” (12:34; 23:33)
- plants that the heavenly Father did not plant (15:13; cf. 13:24–25)

Statements favoring gentiles at the expense of Israel:

- “Heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness” (8:12).

- “The kingdom of God will be taken away from you” (21:43).

Responsibility for Jesus’s blood:

- “Upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth” (23:35).
- Let “his blood be on us and on our children forever” (27:25).

F. The fulfillment of prophecy is important.

Twelve “fulfillment citations” that state, “This happened to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet”: 1:22–23; 2:5–6; 2:15; 2:17–18; 2:23; 4:14–16; 8:17; 12:17–21; 13:14–15; 13:35; 21:4–5; 27:9–10 (cf. 3:3–4; 11:10; 15:7–9; 26:54, 56)

Numerous other prophecies fulfilled in Jesus:

- offered vinegar to drink (27:48; cf. Ps. 69:21)
- tomb of a rich man (27:57–60; cf. Isa. 53:9)

Predictions by Jesus:

- destruction of the temple (24:1–2)
- worldwide mission (24:14; 28:18–19)
- end of the age (24:3–28)
- parousia (16:27–28; 24:29–31)
- final judgment (7:21–23; 25:1–13, 31–46)

G. The law is important:

Questions about Jesus's relationship to the law and the interpretation of the law recur.

- Jesus fulfills the law (5:17–20)
- antitheses (5:21–48)
- tradition of the elders (15:1–20)
- binding and loosing (18:18; cf. 16:19)
- Jesus versus Moses on divorce (19:3–9)
- Pharisees preach but don't practice (23:1–3)

H. Matthew's Gospel presents an apocalyptic vision of the world.

- The world contains "children of God" and "children of the devil" (13:24–30, 36–43).
- People may be classed as "good" or "evil," "righteous" or "unrighteous" (5:45).

I. Matthew is the only Gospel in which Jesus talks explicitly about the church.

- "On this rock I will build my church" (16:18).
- "Tell it to the church" (18:17).

J. Peter is important.

There are several references to Peter and stories about him found nowhere else.

- walks on the water (14:28–31)
- blessed by Jesus (16:17–19)
- finds the coin for the temple tax (17:24–27)
- asks about forgiveness (18:21–22)

K. The abiding presence of God/Jesus is important.

- Jesus is Emmanuel, “God with us” (1:23).
- “Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and . . . the one who sent me” (10:40).
- “Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there” (18:20).
- “Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did to me” (25:40).
- “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (28:20).

6.10

Two Christmas Stories: Similarities and Differences

Similarities		
Jesus is born in Bethlehem during the days of Herod but spends his youth in Nazareth.	Matt. 2:1, 5–6, 23	Luke 2:4–6, 11, 15, 39
Jesus belongs to the family of David.	Matt. 1:1, 6	Luke 2:4; 3:31
Mary is the mother of Jesus, and Joseph is his legal father.	Matt. 1:16–21, 25	Luke 1:35; 2:16, 41, 48
Jesus is born from a miraculous virginal conception announced in advance by an angel.	Matt. 1:18–25	Luke 1:26–38
The name “Jesus” is chosen by God.	Matt. 1:21	Luke 1:31
The family of Jesus must undertake difficult travel due to oppressive political rule.	Matt. 2:7–8, 12–18	Luke 2:1–7
Jesus’s birth is presented as the fulfillment of scriptural promises to Israel.	Matt. 1:22–23; 2:5–6	Luke 1:54–55
Even at birth, Jesus is rejected by some and inspires worship in others.	Matt. 2:10–11, 16–18	Luke 2:7, 20

Differences	
Matthew explains why the family must move from Bethlehem to Nazareth.	Matt. 2:13, 19–23
Luke explains why they must travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem.	Luke 2:2–5
In Matthew, the genealogy of Jesus runs from Abraham to Jesus.	Matt. 1:1–16
In Luke, the genealogy runs in the opposite direction, from Jesus to Adam.	Luke 3:23–38
In Matthew, Joseph is the central character of the story.	Matt. 1:18–25
In Luke, the central character is Mary.	Luke 1:26–56
In Matthew, the angel comes to Joseph to announce the virginal conception.	Matt. 1:20–21
In Luke, this angelic announcement is made to Mary.	Luke 1:26–38

In Matthew, Jesus is given an additional name, "Immanuel."	Matt. 1:23
In Luke, Jesus is given an additional name (or title), "Son of the Most High God."	Luke 1:32
In Matthew, the family of Jesus must flee the wrath of King Herod.	Matt. 2:13–22
In Luke, Caesar Augustus is responsible for the family's burdensome travel.	Luke 2:1–5
In Matthew, the events are said to fulfill quotations from the Old Testament that are cited directly.	Matt. 1:22; 2:15, 17, 23
In Luke, Old Testament Scriptures provide the background for various hymns and canticles.	Luke 1:46–55, 68–79; 2:14, 29–32
In Matthew, the birth of Jesus is noticed by the powerful and the wealthy, who respond with either worship or fear.	Matt. 2:1–12
In Luke, the birth is revealed to peasants who respond with both fear and worship.	Luke 2:8–20

6.11

Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew

The Gospel of Matthew is organized into three sections:

1. Presentation of Jesus (1:1–4:16)
2. Ministry of Jesus (4:17–16:20)
3. Journey, passion, and resurrection of Jesus (16:21–28:20)

The beginning of each new section is marked by the formulaic phrase, “From that time on, Jesus began to . . .” (4:17; 16:21). The significance of this structure is that Matthew devotes an entire introductory section of his Gospel to answering the question “Who is Jesus?” The ultimate answer to that question is that Jesus is the Son of God.

Jesus is the son of David and Abraham, but not of Joseph.

Rather, Joseph is the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born (1:1–17).

Jesus is born to Mary, a virgin, through the work of the Holy Spirit (1:18–25).

God says of Jesus, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased” (3:13–17).

Satan tempts Jesus by saying, “If you are the Son of God . . .” (4:1–10).

At the end of the first section of Matthew's Gospel, the reader knows that Jesus is the Son of God. The reader also knows that it is possible to respond to Jesus the Son of God in two ways:

God's way is to be pleased with Jesus the Son of God.

Satan's way is to challenge Jesus the Son of God.

Throughout the rest of Matthew's story, lines are drawn according to these two possible responses.

He is the Son of God

Disciples confess that Jesus is the Son of God (16:16) and worship him as the Son of God (14:33).

Demons challenge Jesus as the Son of God (8:29).

He is not the Son of God

Religious leaders of Israel sentence Jesus to death because he says that he is the Son of God (26:63–64; cf. 21:33–46; 27:41–43).

The crowd of people vacillates but ultimately joins in challenging Jesus as the Son of God (27:40).

The significance of this dichotomy is heightened when it is realized what Matthew means when he calls Jesus "the Son of God." Basically, he means that Jesus is the one in whom and through whom God is present.

The birth of Jesus fulfills the prophecy of Emmanuel, which means “God is with us” (1:23).

Jesus promises that his Father will do what people ask him, because “Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” (18:20).

Jesus tells his disciples to baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and promises, “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (28:20).

Matthew emphasizes that God is present in Jesus and that Jesus continues to be present in the church.

The disciples who confess Jesus to be the Son of God are the foundation on which Jesus will build his church (16:18).

Matthew is the only Gospel in which Jesus speaks of the church, much less describes it as “his” church or says that he will “build” it.

So, in Matthew’s view:

People who follow God’s way and are pleased with Jesus the Son of God are those who are “made disciples” (28:20) and become part of the church.

People who follow Satan’s way and challenge Jesus the Son of God are those who challenge the church in which Jesus remains present.

6.12

The Disciples of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew

Those who are to “make disciples” of others must first be made disciples themselves.

Jesus calls them to fish for people (4:18–22; cf. 9:9).

Faithful women sent to recover the unfaithful eleven (28:1–10).

The disciples of Jesus are called as sinners.

Jesus has come to save sinners (1:21).

Jesus calls sinners, just as a physician goes to the sick (9:13).

The disciples of Jesus are people of “little faith.”

They worry about being fed and clothed (6:25–34).

They fear a storm at sea (8:26).

Peter is fearful and doubtful (14:30–31).

They misguidedly discuss having no bread (16:8).

They cannot cast out a demon (17:16, 19–20a).

(Cf. “If you have faith the size of a mustard seed . . .” [17:20b].)

The disciples of Jesus worship and doubt.

Peter tries to walk on water (14:28–33).

The eleven gather to receive the Great Commission (28:17).

The disciples increase in understanding.

They have ears that hear and eyes that see (13:16; cf. 11:15; 13:9, 43).

They understand the parables of the kingdom (13:51).

They understand about the “leaven” of the religious leaders (16:12).

They understand about Elijah and John the Baptist (17:11–13).

6.13

John the Baptist in the Gospel of Matthew

The Ministry of John the Baptist Is Reported (3:1–12)

His peculiar dress summons images of Elijah (2 Kings 1:8).

His diet marks him as one who relies completely on God for sustenance (cf. Matt. 6:26).

His preaching of the kingdom parallels that of Jesus (Matt. 4:17) and the disciples (10:7); he also cites other themes that will be picked up later by Jesus: polemic against religious leaders (12:34; 23:33); metaphor of a fruitless tree (7:16–20); description of judgment (9:37–38; 13:37–42).

He prophesies that Jesus (“the coming one”) will bring judgment on the earth.

John Baptizes Jesus (3:13–17)

John initially objects to this baptism, but Jesus responds that it is “necessary to fulfill all righteousness.”

John’s Disciples Ask Why the Disciples of Jesus Don’t Fast (9:14–15)

Jesus compares himself to a bridegroom and the current situation to “a wedding feast.”

***John Questions Jesus's Identity and Jesus Speaks of
John's Role (11:2–15)***

The question is delivered by John's disciples from prison: "Are you the one who is to come?" (Earlier John had seemed to identify Jesus as "the coming one," but had indicated that this "coming one" would bring judgment on the earth.)

Jesus's response alludes to Isaiah 29:18–19 and identifies the present day as the dawn of the messianic age; as before (Matt. 9:14–15), what John's disciples take to be an anomaly results from their failure to recognize that God's gift of salvation precedes judgment.

Jesus tells the crowd that John is the greatest man ever born and that he has fulfilled the prophecy of the return of Elijah (Mal. 4:5), although no earthly glory can compare to that which awaits even "the least" in the kingdom of heaven.

John Is Murdered by Herod (14:1–12)

Herod is an exemplar of the self-absorbed tyrants whom Jesus describes in 20:25. He divorces his own wife to marry his half-sister, who is already married to his half-brother. He lusts after his own stepdaughter and makes the sort of foolish oaths that Jesus forbids in 5:33–37. Matthew presents him as wicked, but also as a buffoon.

Herod's every act is motivated by fear: he keeps John alive because he fears the populace, then has him killed because he fears the

opinions of his dinner guests even more. In the end, he fears that John has returned to haunt him. Thus he illustrates those who fear people and not God (10:28).

By killing John, Herod violently assaults the kingdom of heaven itself, robbing the earth of one of heaven's great treasures (cf. 11:12).

Jesus Speaks about John after the Transfiguration (17:10–13)

Jesus's disciples are given to understand that John's life and death somehow fulfilled the prophecy that Elijah would return (Mal. 4:5).

Jesus Refers to John When His Own Authority Is Questioned (21:23–27)

The religious leaders refuse to acknowledge John's status as a prophet, but neither will they outright deny it, for, like Herod, they are driven by "fear of people" rather than by fear of God.

Jesus indicates that "tax collectors and prostitutes" who listened to John will enter the kingdom of heaven ahead of the religious leaders who did not.

6.14

The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew

Theme: Jesus Dies as One Abandoned

Peter, James, and John fall asleep while Jesus prays in the garden (26:36–45).

Judas betrays him (26:47–50; 27:3–10).

Disciples forsake him and run away (26:56).

Jewish leaders mock him as a false messiah (26:27).

Peter denies him (26:69–75).

The crowds call for him to be crucified (27:15–23).

Roman soldiers mock him as a false king (27:27–30).

Passers-by join Jewish leaders in mocking him on the cross (27:39–43).

Crucified criminals taunt him (27:44).

Darkness covers the land, and Jesus cries out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (27:45–46).

Theme: Jesus’s Death Saves His People from Their Sins

At birth, Jesus is identified as the one who will save his people from their sins (1:21).

Jesus predicts and accepts his passion as the will of God, declaring that he has come to “give his life a ransom for many” (20:28; cf. 16:21–23; 17:22–23; 20:17–19; 26:39, 42).

Jesus speaks of his blood being shed “for the forgiveness of sins” (26:28).

At his death, people rise from the dead, indicating that the power of death has now been broken and life after death is possible (27:50–53).

Theme: Jesus Dies as the Son of God

Jesus’s identity as Son of God is what arouses the most opposition from those who kill him (21:38–39; 26:63–66; 27:41–43).

Ironically, Jesus’s death confirms his identity as Son of God (27:54).

Theme: Jesus Remains Present with His Followers after His Death

Jesus’s death does mark the beginning of a time when he is, in some sense, absent (9:15; 26:11).

But in another sense, Jesus remains eternally present (28:20): among missionaries (10:40), children (18:5), those who pray (18:20), and those in need (25:31–46).

6.15

The Twelve Disciples

All four Gospels indicate that Jesus had twelve disciples who had a privileged status among his many followers. Their names are given in the three Synoptic Gospels and in Acts, as indicated in this chart:

New Testament Lists of the Twelve Disciples

Matthew 10:2–4	Mark 3:16–19	Luke 6:13–16	Acts 1:13–14
Simon Peter	Simon Peter	Simon Peter	Peter
Andrew	James of Zebedee	Andrew	John
James of Zebedee	John of Zebedee	James	James
John of Zebedee	Andrew	John	Andrew
Philip	Philip	Philip	Philip
Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Thomas
Thomas	Matthew	Matthew	Bartholomew
Matthew	Thomas	Thomas	Matthew
James of Alphaeus	James of Alphaeus	James of Alphaeus	James of Alphaeus
Thaddaeus	Thaddaeus	Simon the Zealot	Simon the Zealot
Simon the Cananean	Simon the Cananean	Judas of James	Judas of James
Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot	(Judas Iscariot) (Matthias, cf. 1:26)

Eleven names appear on all four lists, but whereas Matthew and Mark list a disciple named Thaddaeus who is not found on the lists in Luke or Acts, the latter two books list a disciple named “Judas of James” (which could mean “son of James” or “brother of James”) who is not mentioned in Matthew or Mark.

Church tradition resolved this discrepancy by declaring Thaddaeus and Judas to be the same person, offering the not unreasonable

suggestion that this disciple went by the name Thaddaeus to avoid confusion with another disciple named Judas who was among the twelve. Modern scholars allow that this could have been the case but also note the possibility that changes in the personnel of the twelve might have been made at different times (so Thaddaeus could have among the twelve at one point and Judas of James at another point).

Interpreters also note the slight difference in the order in which the disciples are named, though there is a high degree of consistency in the various orderings. Notably, Peter is always listed first, and Judas Iscariot is always listed last.

The matter is complicated somewhat through consideration of John's Gospel, which mentions "the twelve" (6:67, 70–71; 20:24) but never provides a list. If one scours the entire book, the names of some of the twelve familiar from the Synoptics do appear: Andrew (1:40); Peter (1:42), Philip (1:44), Judas Iscariot (6:71), another Judas (14:22), Thomas (20:24–25), and "the sons of Zebedee" (21:2). But this would account for only eight of the twelve. John's Gospel does not mention Bartholomew, Matthew, James of Alphaeus, or Simon the Zealot. And it seems to speak of someone named Nathanael as though he is among the twelve (1:45–49; 21:2).

At some point in church history, ecclesiastic authorities sought to resolve the confusion by simply declaring (without any evidence) that Nathanael is the same person identified as Bartholomew in the other Gospels. That has seemed satisfactory to many Bible readers,

especially since would otherwise be known of Bartholomew and there would be no biblical stories of his exploits to read on August 24, the day assigned to him in the liturgical church year. Scholars are a harder sell and tend to regard the Bartholomew = Nathanael equation as a somewhat facetious attempt at harmonization. Maybe Nathanael was simply a friend of the disciples or, again, maybe the precise membership of “the twelve” changed over time.

Whatever the exact names of these disciples might have been, all four Gospels hold that the concept of “the twelve” is significant. This is no doubt because the number recalls the twelve tribes of Israel, and so Jesus’s designation of a group of followers as “the twelve” was probably intended to symbolize the restoration of Israel that he hoped to effect. Indeed, Jesus is portrayed as promising his disciples that they will judge the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:30).

The significance of the number twelve is also evident in the story reported in Acts 1:15–26, where the early church feels a need to replace Judas Iscariot by selecting Matthias to fill out their number. This process does not continue, however: when James the son of Zebedee is killed (Acts 12:2), no effort is made to replace him. The apostle Paul knew about “the twelve” and, at least two decades before the Gospels were written, he referred to that entity as a group that could authenticate the church’s proclamation of Jesus’s resurrection (1 Cor. 15:5).

6.16

The Presence of God in the Gospel of Matthew

(Box 6.3)

God Is Present in Jesus

- when Jesus is born: “Emmanuel” = “God is with us” (1:23)
- Jesus is worshiped (2:11; 9:18; 14:33; 15:25; 20:20; 28:9, 17)

Jesus Is Present in the Church

- with little children, who are the greatest in the kingdom (18:5)
- with people who gather in his name to pray (18:20)
- with needy members of his spiritual family (25:37–40)
- with those who receive bread and wine in his name (26:26–28)
- with people who baptize, teach, and make disciples (28:19–20)

The Church Is Present in the World

- salt of the earth and light of the world (5:13–14)
- sheep in the midst of wolves (10:16)
- the gates of Hades will not stand (16:18)
- make disciples of all nations (28:19)

Jesus says to his followers, “Whoever welcomes you welcomes me,
and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me” (Matt.
10:40).

6.17

Jesus as the Son of God in Matthew's Gospel

Jack Dean Kingsbury calls attention to the importance of a “Son of God” Christology in Matthew.¹

Structure

Matthew uses the formula “From that time Jesus began . . .” (4:17; 16:21) to organize his Gospel into three parts. The first part (1:1–4:16) contains material that answers the question “Who is Jesus?” and the answer that this material provides is invariably “the Son of God” (see 1:16, 18; 2:15; 3:17; 4:3, 6). Thus the divine sonship of Jesus is emphasized in that section of this Gospel specifically devoted to establishing his identity.

Chiasm

The central theological motif of the Gospel of Matthew (“In the person of his Son Jesus, God has come to dwell with his people”) is expressed through a chiasm involving 1:23 and 28:20. These verses enclose the entire Gospel with the thought that God is with us and will remain with us forever through Jesus. Both passages that comprise this chiasm present Jesus as the Son of God. The context for 1:23 is the virginal conception of Jesus; the context for 28:20 is Jesus’s commission to his disciples to baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (28:19).

The Voice of God

It is clear that, of all the characters in Matthew's narrative, God is the one whose point of view is normative: God's opinion counts more than the opinion of anyone else. Yet God speaks only twice in the narrative, and both times it is in reference to the identity of Jesus (3:17; 17:5). The only time that God ever enters Matthew's narrative as a character in the story is to declare that Jesus is God's Son.

The Passion

The climax of Matthew's story of Jesus comes in the passion narrative; this is the point to which the entire Gospel builds. The passion in Matthew is organized around the motif of Jesus's divine sonship:

- Jesus claims that the reason his enemies want to kill him is that he is the Son of God (21:33–46).
- Jesus is sentenced to death for claiming to be the Son of God (26:63–64).
- Jesus's enemies claim that his crucifixion proves that he is not the Son of God (27:40, 43).
- Ironically, Jesus's death actually convinces people that he is the Son of God (27:54).

The Disciples

A subplot in Matthew's Gospel concerns the disciples of Jesus and their relationship to him. The climax to this "story within the story" comes in 16:13–20, when God reveals to Peter that Jesus is the Son of God.

1. See Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1988).

6.18

Disciples of Jesus as People of Little Faith in the Gospel of Matthew

In the Gospel of Matthew, the disciples of Jesus are called people “of little faith.” In Greek, this phrase is a single word, *oligopistoi*, and it is used by Jesus as a nickname for his disciples.

Matthew 6:30:

Jesus tells his disciples not to worry about what they will wear.

“Consider the lilies of the field,” he says. “If God so clothes the grass of the field . . . will he not much more clothe you—you *of little faith*.”

Matthew 8:26

Jesus is with his disciples in a boat when a storm at sea comes up.

They are terrified. He asks them, “Why are you afraid, you *of little faith*?” Then he miraculously calms the sea.

Matthew 14:31

When Peter tries to walk on the water, he is afraid and begins to sink. He calls out for help, and Jesus grabs him. Lifting him up,

Jesus asks, “*You of little faith*, why did you doubt?”

Matthew 16:8

One day, after miraculously feeding the multitudes, Jesus is teaching his disciples and he uses the metaphor of “leaven.” They misunderstand the expression and think he is concerned about whether they will have enough real leaven to make bread when they

need it. He asks, “*You of little faith*, why are you talking about having no bread?”

Matthew 17:20

When Jesus’s disciples are unable to drive a demon out of a possessed child, Jesus tells them that it is because of their “little faith.” This is the fifth and last time that he uses that expression with them, but then he reveals something especially important: “Truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.”

These concluding words about the mustard seed seem to indicate that being “people of little faith” is not a devastating fault: those with a very small amount of faith can still do great things for God.

6.19

Fear, Joy, Worship, and Doubt in the Gospel of Matthew

Matthew's Gospel pairs typically negative traits with typically positive ones in ways that are ambiguously compatible.

Fear and Joy

[The women] left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. (Matt. 28:8)

Joy typically is a positive quality in Matthew's Gospel:

- “When [the magi] saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy” (2:10).
- “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he had and buys that field” (13:44).
- “Well done, good and trustworthy slave . . . enter into the joy of your master” (25:21, 23).

But joy also can be a sign of superficial or shallow faith:

- “As for what was sown on the rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and

when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word,
that person immediately falls away” (13:20–21).

Fear may seem like a negative quality, but it often does accompany
worship:

- “When the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, ‘It is a ghost!’ . . . And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, ‘Truly, you are the Son of God!’” (14:26, 33).
- “When the disciples heard this [God’s voice at Jesus’s transfiguration], they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear” (17:6).
- “Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, ‘Truly this man was God’s Son!’” (27:54).
- And Jesus says, “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both body and soul in hell” (10:28).

The Ambiguous Compatibility. joy is what turns fear into worship;
fear prevents worship from being shallow.

Worship and Doubt

When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.

(Matt. 28:17)

Worship typically is a positive quality in Matthew's Gospel:

- Magi worship Jesus (2:11).
- A leper worships Jesus (8:2).
- A leader worships Jesus (9:18).
- A Canaanite woman worships Jesus (15:25).
- The mother of James and John worships Jesus (20:20).
- Mary Magdalene and "the other Mary" worship Jesus (28:9).

But worship also can be superficial:

- "This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines" (15:8–9; cf. Isa. 29:13).

Doubt ("little faith") seems to be a negative quality:

- "If God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith" (6:30).
- "He said to them, 'Why are you afraid, you of little faith?' Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a dead calm" (8:26).

- “Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, ‘You of little faith, why did you doubt?’” (14:31).

And yet it is not a fatal flaw:

- A “mustard seed” of faith is all that is required (17:20).
- Jesus encourages seeking, asking, and knocking (6:33; 7:7).

And those who doubt are able to offer sincere worship:

- Immediately after being rebuked by Jesus for doubt, Peter and the other disciples worship Jesus as the Son of God (14:31–33).
- Worship and doubt coincide in the community that receives the Great Commission (28:17–20).

The Ambiguous Compatibility: worship brings doubting faith to life; doubt prevents worship from being self-assured and vain.

6.20

The “Church” in Matthew

Matthew’s View of the Church

The Church Is Instituted by Jesus and Founded on His Authority

Jesus says, “I will build my church” (16:18); establishing the church is part of his mission on earth.

Jesus grounds his “Great Commission” to the disciples on the fact that he has been given “all authority in heaven and earth” (28:18).

Jesus also says that the church will have divine authority to “bind and loose” (18:18).

The Definitive Characteristic of the Church Is the Presence of Jesus

Jesus promises that he will be present wherever two or three gather in his name (18:19) and to be with his followers to the end of the age (28:20).

Special attention is given throughout this Gospel to characters who are said to be “with Jesus”: his mother (2:11), outcasts (9:11), a follower (26:51), and disciples (16:21; 20:17–19; 26:37–38, 40, 69, 71). This is significant, since Jesus says in 12:30, “Whoever is not with me is against me” (cf. 12:14; 26:59; 27:1).

The Church Is Portrayed as “The Family of God”

Jesus, who is the Son of God, designates his disciples as his true family and says that whoever does the will of God is his “brother and sister and mother” (12:46–50). He also says that whatever is done to any member of his family is done to him (25:40).

Followers of Jesus are called “children of God” (5:9, 45; 13:38; cf. 23:9).

The Church Is Typified by Limited “Faith” and by “Understanding” That Is Given by Jesus

The disciples of Jesus are presented as people of “little faith” (6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8; 17:20), but Jesus makes it clear that this is sufficient (17:20).

The disciples are presented as people who “understand” Jesus (13:51; 16:12), but typically this is only after they have been given understanding by Jesus.

6.21

The Theme of Understanding in the Gospel of Matthew

The Importance of Understanding

The parable of the sower establishes the importance of understanding for Matthew's Gospel: the good soil that bears fruit stands for "the one who hears the word and understands it" (13:23). Compare this with Mark 4:20 (the ones who "hear the word and accept it") and Luke 8:15 ("the ones who, when they hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart").

Also in this parable, the seed devoured by birds is explained thus: "When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart" (Matt. 13:19).

The Disciples as People Who Are Given Understanding

Three times the disciples of Jesus are portrayed as people who understand the word of Jesus, but only after that understanding is given to them:

- "'Have you understood all this?' They answered, 'Yes'" (13:51).

- “Then they understood that he had not told them to beware of the yeast of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees” (16:12).
- “Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist” (17:13).

All three references are unique to Matthew. Indeed, a parallel reference in Mark 8:21 indicates the disciples’ continued lack of understanding.

The Disciples’ Understanding Marks Them as Distinctive

The disciples are contrasted with the masses of people who follow Jesus without understanding:

To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. . . . The reason I speak to them in parables is that “seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand.” With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that says, “You will indeed listen, but never understand. . . .” (Matt. 13:11, 13–14)

Concluding Observations

Understanding is not a prerequisite for salvation, but it is for “bearing fruit.” With regard to mission, understanding almost seems more important than faith. The disciples are people of “little faith” in Matthew, yet they are given the Great Commission in 28:18–20. The Canaanite woman in 15:21–28 is a person of “great faith,” yet she is

not given any commission to go and make disciples (see also the centurion with remarkable faith in 8:5–13).

Understanding must be given by God (through Jesus). In 11:25, Jesus prays, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants.”

6.22

Binding and Loosing in the Gospel of Matthew

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus gives the church the authority to bind and to loose commandments of Scripture—that is, to determine when biblical commandments remain applicable to contemporary situations and when they do not.

Jesus says to Peter, “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (16:19).

Jesus says to the twelve, “Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (18:18).

Examples of Binding and Loosing in Matthew

Jesus Gets It Right

In 5:21–22 Jesus binds the law prohibiting murder as applicable to anger and insults, and in 5:27–28 he similarly binds the law prohibiting adultery as applicable to lust. The apparent reason is that the “heart” is the locus of human sin, and thus intentions of the heart are judged by the same standard as actions.

In 12:1–8 Jesus looses the prohibition against performing work on the Sabbath with regard to plucking grain to satisfy one’s hunger,

and in 12:9–13, Jesus looses the prohibition against performing work on the Sabbath with regard to performing works of healing. He declares, “It is lawful to do good on the sabbath” (12:12), and he says that those who do not recognize this “condemn the guiltless” (12:7).

The Scribes and Pharisees Get It Wrong

In 15:1–2 we find that the scribes and Pharisees preserve a tradition of the elders that binds certain priestly regulations regarding ritual handwashing as applicable to all Jews at everyday meals. Jesus rejects this interpretation for his followers, insisting that the scribes and Pharisees do not understand what truly “defiles” a person (15:19–20).

In 15:3–9 we hear that the scribes and Pharisees have loosed commandments requiring people to care for their elderly parents in instances where they can say, “Whatever support you would have had from me is given to God.” Jesus denounces this attempt at loosing the law as making “void the word of God” for the sake of human tradition and as “teaching human precepts as doctrines.”

Elsewhere, Jesus insists that his approach fulfills the law and the prophets while that of the scribes and the Pharisees abolishes the law and the prophets (5:17–20). They ignore commandments that should be kept while interpreting others in ways that become “heavy burdens, hard to bear” (23:4). Jesus is not always more lenient, but he claims to offer a “light burden” and an “easy yoke” (11:30).

Principles for “Binding and Loosing”

Jesus indicates that some matters are of fundamental importance and must be given priority if we are to have lives pleasing to God. The church is to remember these principles as it seeks to apply commandments of Scripture to the present day.

“In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets” (7:12).

“Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners” (9:13).

“If you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless” (12:7).

“‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (22:37–40).

“You tithe mint, dill, and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith” (23:23).

6.23

How to Interpret the Scriptures according to Matthew

Matthew's Gospel maintains that people who do not know the Scriptures have no knowledge of the things of God. Note how Jesus upbraids the religious leaders of Israel:

“Have you not read . . . ?” (12:3, 5; 19:4; 22:31)

“Have you never read . . . ?” (21:16, 42)

See also 9:13; 12:7; 22:29, 43; 26:31.

It is possible, however, to “know” the Scriptures in some sense without truly understanding them:

The religious leaders do possess an academic understanding of Scripture (2:3–6).

Even Satan is able to quote Scripture, albeit with perverse interpretation (4:6).

What is important, then, is to know how to interpret Scripture.

Matthew's Questionable Exegetical Tendencies

Matthew himself does not always interpret Scripture in ways acceptable to scholars today. He quotes verses sometimes from the Septuagint, sometimes from the Hebrew, and sometimes from a

“mixed text” of his own rendering. He creates “mosaic quotations” by joining verses that come from different sources. He adds or changes words in order to bring out the intended meaning. He quotes verses without any consideration for the original context. An example is Matthew 2:6:

“And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who is to shepherd my people Israel.”

The text is basically from the Septuagint, but the word “rulers” in line 2 comes from the Hebrew (and a textual variant at that). Lines 1–3 are from Micah 5:2, and line 4 is from 2 Samuel 5:2. Matthew adds the words “by no means” in line 2, reversing the original sense of both the Septuagint and Hebrew. In their original context, it is unlikely that either the passage from Micah or that from 2 Samuel was intended to be a prophecy concerning the Messiah (cf. Matt. 2:4–6 with John 7:27).

The Christological Key

The key to interpreting Scripture for Matthew is recognizing that all Scripture is fulfilled in the life and teachings of Jesus.

Jesus says, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill” (5:17).

Twelve “fulfillment citations” (1:22–23; 2:5–6, 15, 17–18, 23;
4:14–16; 8:17; 12:17–21; 13:14–15, 35; 21:4–5; 27:9–10).

In emphasizing the fulfillment of Scripture by Jesus, Matthew expresses the theological conviction that the hopes of Israel are realized in him. Jesus is:

the Davidic Messiah

the Isaianic Servant

the Danielic Son of Man

the Greater Moses

Matthew’s citations and adaptations of Scripture do not provide convincing “proof” that Jesus is who Matthew believes him to be. Rather, the revelation of God in Christ sheds light on the Scriptures and reveals their true intent and meaning.

6.24

The Religious Leaders of Israel in Matthew's Narrative

The religious leaders of Israel are presented as “flat characters” in Matthew's story—that is, predictable figures who serve to embody the root trait of being evil.¹

The World of Matthew's Story

The parable of the wheat and weeds in 13:24–30 offers a dualistic picture of the world that contrasts with the biblical image of Genesis.

The parable is explained in 13:36–43:

The Son of Man put people in this world (the wheat).

The devil also put people in this world (the weeds).

God's servants (the field hands) should not try to get rid of the devil's children, for they might mistakenly eliminate some who were put here by the Son of Man.

The children of the Son of Man and the children of the devil must coexist.

The angels (the harvesters) will take care of the devil's children at the end of time, throwing them into the fires of hell and separating out the righteous for salvation.

This is bleak imagery. There is no hope for children of the devil. They cannot be reached by preaching, and they cannot repent. Weeds do not become wheat. The gospel is for children of the Son of Man, and those who accept it will be saved; people put here by the devil are destined for damnation. They will torment believers until the end and then get what is coming to them.

Identifying the Weeds

Later in Matthew's story, Jesus identifies the religious leaders of Israel with the weeds of this parable:

“Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if one blind person guides another, both will fall into a pit” (15:13–14).

This is consistent with the rest of Matthew's story:

Jesus (and the narrator of Matthew's Gospel) repeatedly characterizes the religious leaders of Israel as “evil” (9:4; 12:34, 39; 16:4; 22:18), as a “brood of vipers” (12:34; 23:33), and as children “of hell” (23:15).

In this Gospel (unlike the others), there are no exceptions to the portrayal of the religious leaders as evil. There is not a single instance in which any religious leader of Israel says, does, thinks, or believes anything that is right.

Jesus never preaches to the religious leaders or calls them to repent (any more than he would the demons that he exorcizes). He simply tells them that they are evil and assures them of the eternal condemnation that awaits: “You snakes, you brood of vipers! How can you escape being sentenced to hell?” (23:33).

The Religious Leaders’ Role as “Flat Characters”

Did the historical author of this Gospel really believe that the scribes and Pharisees who interacted with Jesus were put on earth by the devil, that they were irredeemably evil and thus not candidates for conversion (didn’t he know about Paul)? This seems unlikely.

Literary critics maintain that “flat characters” in a narrative function primarily to personify values. In Matthew’s narrative, the scribes and Pharisees personify the primal value “evil”; what the scribes and Pharisees do in this story is what evil does: it condemns the guiltless (12:7), blasphemes the Holy Spirit (12:31), neglects the weightier matters of the law (23:23), and so on. Matthew’s readers probably are not expected to draw historical conclusions about scribes and Pharisees from this story, but rather are expected to come to an understanding of the nature of evil. They are expected to recognize that evil tends to be hypocritical, masquerading as good (23:27–28); involves unwitting self-deception, failing to recognize its own duplicity (15:14; 23:16–22); and perverts what otherwise would be good, ignoring motives or outcomes (6:2, 5, 16).

1. See Mark Allan Powell, *Chasing the Eastern Star: Biblical Adventures in Reader-Response Criticism* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001).

6.25

The Bias against Gentiles in the Gospel of Matthew

Matthew's narrative presupposes an anti-gentile prejudice on the part of its readers:

In 5:47, Jesus tells his disciples, "If you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?" The word "gentiles" is used in parallel structure to the term "tax collectors" in the preceding verse ("Do not even the tax collectors do the same?").

In 6:7, Jesus tells his disciples, "When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words." The word "gentiles" is used in parallel structure to the word "hypocrites" in 6:5 ("Whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites").

In 6:25–32, Jesus tells his disciples, "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. . . . For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things."

In 10:5–6, Jesus sends his disciples out on a healing mission to "cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out

demons” (10:8). He tells them, “Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Here the word “gentiles” is in parallel structure to “Samaritans.”

In 10:18, Jesus warns his disciples, “You will be dragged before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them and the Gentiles.” Here gentiles (along with “governors and kings”) are cited as one example of wolves into whose midst Jesus’s disciples are sent as sheep (10:16).

In 18:17, Jesus concludes his instructions to the disciples on how to deal with unrepentant sinners by saying, “If the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.” Again the word “gentile” is parallel to the term “tax collector.” Notably, the only other word with which “tax collector” is sometimes paired is “prostitute” (21:31–32).

In 20:25–26, Jesus tells his disciples, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you.”

Gentiles are associated with vanity, tyranny, and sin. Even their best behavior is self-serving. God does not want to hear their long-winded prayers or heal their diseases. They can pretty much be put in the same class with hypocrites, traitors, and whores—people whom Matthew’s readers are expected to despise.

6.26

Jewish Responsibility for the Death of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew

Prologue: A Survey in Christian Interpretation

History

Jesus was crucified as a Jewish victim of Roman violence. On this, all authorities agree. A gentile Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, condemned him to death and had him tortured and executed by gentile Roman soldiers. He was, indeed, one of thousands of Jews crucified by the Romans during this period.

The New Testament testifies to this basic fact, but it also allows for Jewish involvement in two ways. First, a few high-ranking Jewish authorities who owed their position and power to the Romans conspired with the gentile leaders to have Jesus put to death; they are said to have been jealous of him and to have viewed him as a threat to the status quo. Second, an unruly mob of people in Jerusalem called out for Jesus to be crucified; the number and, for that matter, ethnic identification of persons in this “crowd” is not given, nor is any motive supplied for their action (except to say that they had been “stirred up” by the Jewish authorities).

Theology

The Christian Scriptures are less interested in recording historical facts about Jesus’s death than in explaining the meaning of that

death. Christians claim that Jesus died as an *atonement for sin*. His death is interpreted as a ransom that frees people from the effects of sin (Mark 10:45), as a sacrifice that removes the consequences of sin (John 1:29), and as a loving act that reconciles humans with a forgiving God of love (Rom. 5:6–10).

For Christians, historical responsibility for the death of Jesus is theologically irrelevant. Christians do not believe that Jesus was overpowered by hostile Romans or Jews or anyone else. They believe that, whatever the precise circumstances of his execution, he died because it was God’s will for him to give his life as an atonement for sin, and he was obedient to this purpose (Phil. 2:8).

Preaching

Christian preachers usually try to proclaim the relevance of Jesus’s atoning death to their immediate audience. They preach not just general theology (“Christ died for the sins of the whole world”) but rather specific application of that theology (“Christ died for *our* sins”).

Christian preachers usually do not dwell on the literal historical responsibility for the death of Jesus (“The Romans killed Jesus” or “The Jews killed Jesus”), but rather emphasize a nonliteral personal responsibility for the death of Jesus: “We crucified Jesus—you and I. His blood was shed on our account.”

Jewish Responsibility for the Death of Jesus in Matthew

Certain texts in the Christian New Testament seem to emphasize Jewish responsibility for the death of Jesus in a way that goes beyond the historical involvement of a few compromised authorities and an unruly mob. One such passage is 1 Thessalonians 2:14–16. The best-known text of this nature, however, is found in Matthew’s Gospel:

Now at the festival the governor was accustomed to release a prisoner for the crowd, anyone whom they wanted. At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Jesus Barrabas. So after they had gathered, Pilate said to them, “Whom do you want me to release for you, Jesus Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Messiah?” For he realized that it was out of jealousy that they had handed him over. While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, “Have nothing to do with that innocent man, for today I have suffered a great deal because of a dream about him.” Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed. The governor again said to them, “Which of the two do you want me to release for you?” And they said, “Barabbas.” Pilate said to them, “Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?” All of them said, “Let him be crucified!” Then he asked, “Why, what evil has he done?” But they shouted all the more, “Let him be crucified!”

So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, “I am innocent of this man’s blood; see

to it yourselves.” Then the people as a whole answered, “His blood be on us and on our children!” So he released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified. (27:15–26)

Why would the author of Matthew’s Gospel want to emphasize Jewish guilt rather than Roman guilt in bringing about the death of Jesus and, indeed, extend responsibility for this blood to the descendants (children) of those who were actually present? It seems unlikely that Matthew would want to “let the Romans off the hook,” exonerate them for an obvious act of injustice and sadism.

Most scholars think that Matthew himself was Jewish and that he wrote his Gospel for a congregation of Jewish persons who believed in Jesus as the Messiah. Thus Matthew exemplifies a typical theme in Christian preaching, insisting that he and his congregation bear *personal responsibility for the death of Jesus* and so share in atonement through his blood.

Matthew is not saying, “*Those Jews* are to blame for killing Jesus.” He is saying, “*We Jews* are responsible for killing Jesus. We can’t just blame Pilate and the Romans. His blood is on us.”

But in terms of Christian theology, the blood of Jesus is what brings salvation and forgiveness of sins (see 26:28).

Interpretation of Jesus’s Death in an Anti-Semitic World

Presentations of the passion of Jesus in Christian history have sometimes moved from preaching to polemics. In cultures where anti-Semitism runs high, Jewish involvement in the death of Jesus has been emphasized and reinterpreted as conveying blame rather than atonement.

Thus Matthew's Gospel and similar texts would come to be, and are sometimes still, read by gentile Christians not as saying "we crucified Jesus," but rather as saying "they crucified Jesus." The essential theological meaning of the story is lost, replaced by a political and social interpretation that explains why Jewish people ought to be despised by gentiles. Jews are routinely condemned in such cultures as "Christ-killers," and the misfortunes of Jewish people are explained as a consequence of having been cursed by God for their involvement in the crucifixion of Jesus the Messiah. Such interpretations of the passion have rarely (if ever) found official acceptance among Christian theologians, but they have flourished at a popular level and have been used in attempts to justify centuries of discrimination and persecution of Jewish people.

The most visible representations of these anti-Semitic interpretations were the passion plays that were performed for hundreds of years in Western Christian countries. In an era before television and cinema, such plays were a principal form of entertainment; often they were produced and performed by secular troupes apart from any official sanction of the church. In many countries, passion plays were an

annual amusement. They opened each year on Ash Wednesday and ran throughout the Lenten season (i.e., until Easter). Features of the passion plays that exhibited and encouraged anti-Semitism:

The Jewishness of Jesus and his disciples was minimized or completely ignored; the only characters who appeared Jewish were the “bad Jews” who conspired to kill Christ.

Characterization of these “bad Jews” tended to be melodramatic; they were presented as sinister and demonic figures whose opposition to Jesus lacked any reasonable motive.

Actors playing these supposedly first-century Jews portrayed them in ways associated with contemporary Jewish figures, dressing in garb worn by Jews of the current day, speaking with affected Jewish accents, and drawing for comic effect on negative stereotypes associated with Jewish people in the culture where the play was performed.

The role of the (gentile) Roman government in Jesus’s execution was greatly minimized; Pilate was presented as a sympathetic figure, forced to sentence Jesus by the hostile Jews.

In short, Jesus became a Christian victim of Jewish violence rather than a Jewish victim of Roman violence.

In recent years (especially since the Holocaust of the Nazi era), virtually all Christian churches have repudiated the production of such inaccurate and culturally insensitive passion plays. The Roman Catholic Church, in particular, has issued guidelines for dramatic presentations of Christ's passion, in the hope that mistakes of the past can be avoided.

6.27

Variations on “the Golden Rule”

Among the most famous words ever attributed to Jesus are those found in Matthew 7:12, “Do to others as you would have them do to you.” The passage has traditionally been called the “Golden Rule.” Not surprisingly, similar sayings have been attributed to other respected teachers or sages throughout history.

Confucius (551–479 BCE): The Chinese wise man is reported to have said, “Do not do to others what you would not want others to do to you.”

Herodotus (484–425 BCE): This Greek historian is quoted as saying, “I will not myself do that which I consider to be blameworthy in my neighbor.”

Tobit (ca. 225–175 BCE): The protagonist of this Jewish folktale tells his son, “What you hate, do not do to anyone” (4:15)

Ben Sira (ca. 200–180 BCE): This Jewish teacher instructs his students to “Judge your neighbor’s feelings by your own” (Sirach 31:15)

Rabbi Hillel (ca. 110 BCE–10 CE): The famous Jewish rabbi who lived in Jerusalem only a few decades before Jesus is also credited with a version of the Golden Rule. The context is interesting: a gentile comes to Rabbi Hillel and indicates that he would like to become a Jewish proselyte but keeping Torah seems overwhelming.

He says he will become a convert if the rabbi can teach him the entire Torah while standing on one foot. The rabbi complies and, standing on one foot, says, “What is hateful to you, do not to your neighbor. That is the whole Torah, while the rest is commentary.”

This last example has the closest affinity to the teaching of Jesus because it suggests keeping the Golden Rule fulfills all that God requires:

- Jesus: “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; *for this is the law and the prophets*” (Matt. 7:12, emphasis added).
- Hillel: “What is hateful to you, do not to your neighbor. *That is the whole Torah, while the rest is commentary*” (emphasis added).

Scholars have noted that Jesus is remembered as making the point positively while Hillel (and others cited above) is remembered for making the point negatively.

Naturally, scholars have wondered whether Jesus might have been influenced by Hillel’s teaching; perhaps he was echoing his own version of the popular rabbi’s wisdom. Another possibility, however, is that the tradition concerning Hillel was influenced by the New Testament Gospels—the teachings of Hillel were not put into writing until long after the New Testament and, though there is some

evidence that this Hillel tradition dates to the first century CE, it cannot with confidence be dated prior to the historical time of Jesus.

Thus it is possible that

1. Hillel followers remembered Hillel as having said something that actually should have been attributed to Jesus, or
2. Jesus-followers remembered Jesus as having said something that actually should have been attributed to Hillel, or
3. both Hillel followers and Jesus followers correctly remembered their teachers as saying similar things.

In any case, the basic sentiment expressed in the Golden Rule seems to have widespread cultural and historical support.

6.28

Community Rules (Box 6.4)

Compare these guidelines from the Gospel of Matthew and from the *Community Rule* for the Qumran community (one of the Dead Sea Scrolls):

- “If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.” (Matt. 18:15–17)
- “[You shall not] address [your] companion with anger, or ill-temper, or obduracy, or with envy prompted by the spirit of wickedness. [You shall] not hate him because of his uncircumcised heart, but [you shall] rebuke him on the very same day lest [you] incur guilt because of him. And, furthermore, let no [one] accuse his companion before the Congregation without having first admonished him in the presence of witnesses.” (*Community Rule* 5:25–6:1)¹

1. *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, 7th ed., trans. Geza Vermes (New York: Penguin, 2012).

6.29

The Mocking of the Righteous in Wisdom and in Matthew

Wisdom of Solomon (also called Wisdom) is a deuterocanonical book written in Greek by a Hellenistic Jew in the latter part of the first century BCE. The author of Matthew's Gospel probably knew this book and may have considered it to be part of Scripture since it was included in the Septuagint or Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible in use at the time. Today Wisdom constitutes part of what Protestant Christians call the Apocrypha.

One passage in Wisdom presents the mocking of a righteous man by the ungodly in terms that parallel the mocking of Jesus on the cross by evil religious leaders in the Gospel of Matthew.

Note first, the thought of the ungodly regarding the righteous man:

Let us lie in wait for the righteous man,
because he is inconvenient to us and opposes our actions;
he reproaches us for sins against the law,
and accuses us of sins against our training.
He professes to have knowledge of God
and calls himself a child of the Lord.
He became to us a reproof of our thoughts;
the very sight of him is a burden to us,
because his manner of life is unlike that of others,
and his ways are strange.

We are considered by him as something base,
and he avoids our ways as unclean.

Wisdom 2:12–16a

The Gospel of Matthew presents the religious leaders of Israel as harboring similar thoughts and attitudes toward Jesus. They want to trap him (Matt. 12:14; 22:15) because he challenges them (Matt. 12:9–13; 15:7–9), denounces them publicly (Matt. 23:2–7, 13–36) and claims to have a unique relationship with God (Matt. 9:2–3; 12:6, 8, 41–42). Further, his lifestyle is strange and offensive to them (Matt. 9:11; 11:19) and yet he considers them to be the ones who are debased (Matt. 15:14).

Then, Wisdom of Solomon continues with these words:

[He] boasts that God is his father.
Let us see if his words are true,
and let us test what will happen at the end of his life;
for if the righteous man is God's child, he will help him,
and will deliver him from the hand of his adversaries.
Let us test him with insult and torture,
so that we may find out how gentle he is,
and make trial of his forbearance.
Let us condemn him to a shameful death,
for, according to what he says, he will be protected.

Wisdom 2:16b–20

The account of Jesus's crucifixion in the Gospel of Matthew says,

Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, “You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.” In the same way, the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him, saying, ‘He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, ‘I am God’s Son.’” (Matt. 27:39–43)

6.30

Matthew 3:4—John’s Clothing and Diet (Church Tradition)

The Gospels of Matthew and Mark describe John the Baptist as having what might be regarded as a peculiar wardrobe and diet:

Matthew 3:4	Mark 1:6
“Now John wore clothing of camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey.”	“Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.”

Modern Scholarship

Modern scholars usually account for John’s clothing and diet in one (or both) of two ways:¹

Historical scholars ask why John would have dressed and eaten in such a manner, and the explanation is usually that by so doing he could live an austere life dependent on no one but God. He dressed himself in what could be found in the desert (loose camel hair woven together and fastened with a strip of animal skin) and he ate what he could find there (either literal locusts or, possibly, a type of bean pod that was popularly called a “locust”).

Redaction critics ask why Matthew and Mark wanted to tell their readers these details; the answer is usually that they wanted to liken John to Elijah, who is described in a similar manner in 2 Kings 1:8 (compare Matthew 17:9–13; Mark 9:9–13).

Early Church Tradition

Some writers in the first few centuries of church history offer comments.

Jerome (ca. 347–420):

John the Baptist had a religious mother and his father was a priest. Yet neither his mother's affection nor his father's affluence could induce him to live in his parents' house at the risk of the world's temptations. So he lived in the desert. Seeking Christ with his eyes, he refused to look at anything else. His rough garb, his girdle made of skins, his diet of locusts and wild honey were all alike designed to encourage virtue and continence.

(Letter 125.7)²

John Chrysostom (ca. 349–407):

You may ask, why did he wear a leather girdle? . . . Elijah also was so clothed, and likewise many others among holy men, either because they were engaged in heavy labor, or were upon a journey, or in any other necessity that involved labor, and because they despised ornament, and followed an austere way of life.

It was necessary that the precursor of the One who was to undo the age-long burdens of men, such as toil, malediction, pain and sweat, should in his own person give some token of the gifts to come, so as to stand above these tribulations. And so it was that he neither tilled the earth, nor plowed the furrow, nor did he eat bread of his own sweat, for his table was easily prepared, and

his clothing more easily than his table, and his dwelling more easily than his clothing. For he had need neither of roof, nor bed, nor table, nor any such thing. But even while still within this flesh of ours he lived an almost angelic life. His clothing was put together from the hair of camels, so that even from his garments he might teach us that we free ourselves of human needs, and need not be bound to this earth, but that we may return to the pristine dignity in which Adam first lived, before he had need of garments or of clothing. (*The Gospel of Matthew*, Homily 10)³

Cyril of Jerusalem (313–386):

He fed on locusts to make his soul grow wings. Sated with honey, the words he spoke were sweeter than honey and of more profit. Clothed in a garment of camel's hair, he exemplified in his own person the holy life. (*The Catechetical Lectures* 3.6)⁴

1. See Joan E. Taylor, *The Immerser: John the Baptist within Second Temple Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

2. P. Schaaf et al., eds., *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 2nd series, 14 vols. (New York: Christian Literature, 1887–94), 6:246

3. Schaaf et al., eds., *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 1st series, 14 vols. (New York: Christian Literature, 1887–94), 10:63

4. J. Ballie et al., eds., *Library of Christian Classics*, 26 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953–66), 4:93–94.

6.31

Matthew 3:16—Why a Dove? (Church Tradition)

The Synoptic Gospels all report that the Spirit of God descended on Jesus like a dove at his baptism.

Matthew 3:16	Mark 1:10	Luke 3:21–22
“And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him.”	“And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him.”	“Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove.”

Many writers in the early church would wonder about the significance of the dove. Perhaps it is because doves are symbols of innocence (cf. Matt. 10:16) or purity or peace, or maybe it has something to do with Noah, who was brought an olive branch by a dove to let him know the flood was over (Gen. 8:8–11). But Ambrose wanted to make clear that it wasn’t a *real* dove (see below)!

Gregory Thaumaturgus (213–270):

God opened the gates of the heavens and sent down the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, lighting upon the head of Jesus, pointing him out right there as the new Noah, even the maker of Noah, and the good pilot of the nature [that is, of humanity] which is in shipwreck. (*The Fourth Homily, On the Holy Theophany, or Christ’s Baptism*)¹

Origen (185–ca. 254):

A dove—a tame, innocent and simple bird. Hence we are taught to copy the innocence of doves.

Tertullian (ca. 160–ca. 220):

The Holy Spirit came in the form of a dove in order that the nature of the Holy Spirit might be made plain by means of a creature of utter simplicity and innocence. For the dove's body has no gall in it. So after the deluge, by which the iniquity of the old world was purged away, after, so to speak, the baptism of the world, the dove as herald proclaimed to the earth the tempering of the wrath of heaven—sent forth from the ark and returning with an olive branch, which is a sigh of peace among the nations.

(*On Baptism* 8)²

John Chrysostom (ca. 349–407):

But why in the form of a dove? The dove is a gentle and pure creature. Since then the Spirit, too, is “a Spirit of gentleness,” he appears in the form of a dove, reminding us of Noah, to whom, when once a common disaster had overtaken the whole world and humanity was in danger of perishing, the dove appeared as a sign of deliverance from the tempest, and bearing an olive branch, published the good tidings of a serene presence over the whole world. All these things were given as a type of things to come. . . . In this case the dove also appeared, not bearing an olive branch, but pointing to our Deliverer from all evils, bringing hope filled with grace. For this dove does not simply lead one

family out of an ark, but the whole world toward heaven at her appearing. And instead of a branch of peace from an olive tree, she conveys the possibility of adoption for all the world's offspring in common. (*The Gospel of Matthew* 12.3)³

The Venerable Bede (672–735):

The image of a dove is placed before us by God so that we may learn the simplicity favored by him. So let us meditate on the nature of the dove, that from each one of its features of innocence we may learn the principles of a more becoming life. The dove is a stranger to malice. So may all bitterness, anger and indignation be taken away from us, together with all malice. The dove injures nothing with its mouth or talons, nor does it nourish itself or its young on tiny mice or grubs, as do almost all smaller birds. Let us see that our teeth are not weapons and arrows.⁴

Ambrose (347–397):

The Holy Spirit descended as a dove. Not “a dove descended,” but “as a dove.” (*The Sacraments* 1.6)

1. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 10 vols. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1885–96), 6:70–71.
2. H. D. Smith, ed., *Ante-Nicene Exegesis of the Gospels*, 6 vols. (London: SPCK, 1925), 1:304.
3. P. Schaaf et al., eds., *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 2nd series, 14 vols. (New York: Christian Literature, 1887–94), 10:77.

4. The Venerable Bede, *Homilies on the Gospels*, trans. L. T. Martin and D. Hurst
(Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1990), 1.12.

6.32

Matthew 3:17—Quoting God: Why the Gospels

Differ

One of the only times that God speaks directly in the New Testament may be found in the stories of Jesus’s baptism. But what God says in Matthew differs slightly from what God says in the other two Synoptic Gospels.

Matthew 3:17	Mark 1:11	Luke 3:22
And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”	And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”	And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

Though the English is the same in both Mark and Luke in the NRSV, the Greek uses different prepositions: a more literal translation might read “with you” in Mark and “in you” in Luke.

The more significant difference, however, is that in Matthew, God speaks about Jesus in the third person, apparently informing John and others gathered as to the identity of the one who had just been baptized. In Mark and in Luke, *God speaks to Jesus in the second person*, informing him of his identity—or confirming that identity.

Scholars have tried to interpret these modes of divine revelation (*about* Jesus or *to* Jesus) in light of the Gospels’ christological understandings.

Augustine (354–430)

The Bishop of Hippo rightly discerned that Bible readers might be troubled by this apparent discrepancy. One would think that, if ever there were a time for precision, it would be in citing the words of God spoken directly from heaven. But the bishop assured readers that such precision is unnecessary because the verses all mean the same thing:

Whichever of the Evangelists may have preserved for us the words as they were literally uttered by the heavenly voice, the others have varied the terms only with the object of setting forth the same sense more familiarly, so that what is thus given by all of them might be understood as if the expressions were: "In You I have set me good pleasure," that is to say, "by You I am doing what is my pleasure."

So, the second-person account is to be preferred. And all three of the evangelists might have done better to say "by you" rather than "with whom," "with you," or even "in you."¹

Did God Speak Greek?

Augustine leaves unanswered the question of what language God actually spoke. If it were Greek (the language in which all three Synoptic record the saying) it is unlikely that John, Jesus himself, or any of the bystanders would have understood. If God spoke in Hebrew or in Aramaic, then the issue becomes one of variant translations.

1. P. Schaaf et al., eds., *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 2nd series, 14 vols. (New York: Christian Literature, 1887–94), 6:119–20.

6.33

Matthew 4:1–11—Temptation of Jesus and of Adam and Eve

The Gospels of Matthew and Luke record the story of Jesus’s temptation by Satan in the wilderness. Their versions are quite similar, though their orders of temptations differ.

Matthew 4:1–11	Luke 4:1–13
<p>Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. 3 The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” 4 But he answered, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”</p> <p>5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, 6 saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’” 7 Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”</p> <p>8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; 9 and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” 10 Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! for it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’” 11 Then the devil left</p>	<p>Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, 2 where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. 3 The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.”</p> <p>4 Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’”</p> <p>5 Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. 6 And the devil said to him, “To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. 7 If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” 8 Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’”</p> <p>9 Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, 10 for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,’ 11 and ‘On their</p>

him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.	hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.” 12 Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” 13 When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.
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The apostle Paul may or may not have known this story, but he does liken Jesus to a second Adam (1 Cor. 15:45–49). Adam and Eve were tempted by a serpent in Genesis 3:1–13:

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden’?” The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.’” But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" He said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate." Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent tricked me, and I ate."

Perhaps this is what inspired a popular interpretation of the story offered by Gregory the Great (ca. 540–604). Also known as Saint Gregory and as Pope Gregory I, this church leader (for whom Gregorian chants would be named) explained how the temptations of Jesus corresponded to those of Adam (and Eve):

The Ancient Enemy raised himself in three temptations against our first parents, for then he tempted them with gluttony, vainglory, and avarice. And in tempting, he was triumphant, for he made them subject to him through their consent.

Indeed, he tempted them with gluttony, when he showed them the food of the forbidden tree and persuaded them to eat. He tempted them with vainglory when he said, "you shall be as Gods." And having made progress to this point he tempted them

through avarice when he spoke of “knowing good and evil.” For avarice has as its object not only money, but loftiness of estate.

But in the same way that he [Satan] overcame the first man, he lay subdued before the Second.

He tempted him also with gluttony when he said, “Command that these stones be made bread.” He tempted him with vainglory when he said, “If thou be the Son of God cast thyself down.” And with avarice for loftiness and power, he tempted him when he showed him all the world, saying, “All these things will I give thee if falling down thou wilt adore me.” (*Forty Gospel Homilies* 16.2–3)¹

For centuries Gregory’s interpretation would be standard fodder for preaching; for example, it is quoted verbatim in the work of Peter Lombard (ca. 1096–1160), a scholastic theologian and Bishop of Paris (see his *Sententiae* 2.21.5).

Some exegetes, however, have found the analogy strained. John Calvin (1509–64) said that it was “ridiculous” to equate *gluttony* with the desire for a hungry man to eat bread: “What kind of high living is there in bread?” he asks. “Is it not ridiculous to speak of an immoderate display of gluttony in the case of a hungry man seeking food to satisfy his nature?” (*Harmony of the Gospels* 1.134–137).

But by then, Gregory’s reading of the story had already inspired a thousand years of sermons.

1. Cited in David Lyle Jeffrey, ed. *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 753–54.

6.34

Matthew 5:27–30—Plucking Out Eyes and Cutting Off Hands (Tradition and Literature)

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus says,

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell. (Matt. 5:27–30)

A similar passage occurs in Mark in a different context:

“If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea. If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be

thrown into hell, where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched. (Mark 9:42–48)

So in Matthew's Gospel Jesus says that his followers should take extreme measures to avoid committing sins such as adulterous lust, and in Mark's Gospel he says that they should take extreme measures to avoid causing others to stumble.

(Almost) Literal Interpretation

A few interpreters have taken Jesus's words literally, believing that they can prevent sin by cutting off parts of their body. However, it was soon discovered that hands, feet, and eyes are not the main culprits in leading a man to lust. Thus some religious extremists have practiced self-castration as a means to purify themselves from unwanted sexual desires. Matthew 19:12 is often cited in support of such an interpretation ("there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven").

The most famous self-made eunuch in church history would be Origen (ca. 184–253), a very prominent early Christian theologian and biblical scholar. The fourth-century historian Eusebius reports that Origen castrated himself, but the accuracy of that report is now contested. Some historians claim the action would not fit well with Origen's expressed ideas and they suspect Eusebius was duped into reporting a rumor that had been circulated by Origen's detractors. Others find no good reason to deny the truth of Eusebius's claims.

Metaphorical Interpretations

The recommendation to pluck out eyes or cut off hands or feet has usually been taken symbolically, but what then would be the point?

Augustine (354–430) suggests that “whatever it is that is meant by the ‘eye’ undoubtedly it is such a thing as is ardently loved. For those who wish to express their affection strongly are wont to speak thus: I love him as my own eyes . . . so that the left is indeed a beloved counsellor” (“Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount,” 1.13.37–38).¹

William Tyndale (1494–1536) says, “This is not meant of the outward members [literal body parts] . . . But it is a phrase or speech of the Hebrew tongue, and will that we cut off occasions, dancing, kissing, riotous eating and drinking, and the lust of the heart, and filthy imaginations, that move a man to concupiscence.”²

Thus one may need to give up relationships (Augustine) or activities (Tyndale) that prove to be an impediment to spiritual purity.

John Calvin (1509–64) summarizes, “Christ in hyperbole bids us prune back anything that stops us offering God obedient service, as He demands in His law” (*Commentary on Matt.* 5:29–30).

Literary Allusions

The image has captured the attention of many authors and poets.³

In “A Shropshire Lad,” **A. E. Houseman** (1859–1936) writes,

If it chance your eye offend you,

Pluck it out, lad, and be sound;
'Twill hurt, but here are salves to friend you,
And many a balsam grows on ground!
And if your hand or foot offend you,
Cut it off, lad, and be whole;
But play the man, stand up and end you,
When your sickness is in your soul.

In *Gone with the Wind*, by **Margaret Mitchell** (1900–1949), Rhett Butler says of his father, “Everyone admired him tremendously for having cut me off and counted me as dead. ‘If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out!’ I was his right eye, his oldest son, and he plucked me right out with a vengeance” (chap. 43).

1. P. Schaaf et al., eds., *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 1st series, 14 vols. (New York: Christian Literature, 1887–94), 6:16.
2. William Tyndale. “An Exposition upon the Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Chapters of Matthew,” in *The Works of the English Reformers: William Tyndale and John Frith*, Vol. 2, ed. Thomas Russell (London: Ebenezer Palmer, 1881), 285.
3. See David Lyle Jeffrey, ed., *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 371–72.

6.35

Matthew 6:9–13—The Lord’s Prayer in Martin Luther’s *Small Catechism*

The Protestant reformer Martin Luther (1483–1546) wrote a pocket-sized book called *The Small Catechism* for parents to use when instructing their children in the basics of the Christian faith. The *Small Catechism* is divided into sections dealing with the Ten Commandments, the Apostles’ Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, the Sacrament of Baptism, and the Sacrament of the Altar. Each section features questions and answers on the topics.

For several centuries, Lutheran Christians were expected to memorize all the answers to questions posed in the *Small Catechism* and they were often tested on these in front of the entire congregation before they could be “confirmed” and accepted as adult members of the church. That tradition has waned in the modern day (though it is still sometimes practiced).

Here is an example of the questions and answers Luther’s *Small Catechism* provides concerning the meaning of the Lord’s Prayer (as taught by Jesus in Matthew 6:9–13).

The First Petition

Hallowed be your name.

Q. *What is this? or What does this mean?*

A. It is true that God's name is holy in itself, but we ask in this prayer that it may also become holy in and among us.

Q. *How does this come about?*

A. Whenever the word of God is taught clearly and purely and we, as God's children, also live holy lives according to it. To this end help us, dear Father in heaven! However, whoever teaches and lives otherwise than the word of God teaches, dishonors the name of God among us. Preserve us from this, heavenly Father!

6.36

Matthew 10:16—Emulating Serpents and Doves

Jesus says to his disciples, “See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves” (Matt 10:16).

Basic Meaning

The verse contains three similes and a metaphor:

- Jesus’s disciples will be like sheep (because they will be vulnerable)
- The people among whom they go will be wolves (prone to take advantage of them and do them harm)
- they should therefore be like serpents (wise)
- but they should also be like doves (innocent).

It is obvious why sheep are vulnerable and wolves are prone to harm the vulnerable.

Serpents may serve as a simile for wisdom, because in Jewish tradition the serpent was the wisest of all creatures in the garden of Eden (Gen. 3:1).

And doves may stand for innocence because they had been a symbol of peace ever since a dove signaled to Noah that God’s urge to destroy humanity had abated (Gen. 8:8–11).

Augustine's Interpretation

Not content with the basic interpretation above, Augustine of Hippo (354–430) searched for attributes of serpents and doves worth emulating. The doves were relatively easy: “Mark how doves rejoice in society; they fly and feed together always; they do not love to be alone; they delight in communion; they preserve affection; their cooings are the plaintive cries of love; with kissings they beget their young.” (*Sermons* 14.4)

The serpents, by Augustine's own admission, were a bit more difficult. He initially questions, “What hath the wisdom of the serpent to do in the simplicity of the dove?” Ultimately, he determines the snake's laying “aside his old coat of skin, that he may spring forth into new life” worthy of imitation just as the apostle Paul said, “put away your former way of life, your old self” (Eph. 4:22). The snake's tendency to protect its head as its source of life, Augustine observes, is also worthy of imitation because Christians must remain connected to Christ as their head and source of life. He concludes, “Whoso then keepeth Christ in him, keepeth his head for his protection” (*Sermons* 14.3)¹.

1. P. Schaaf et al., eds., *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 2nd series, 14 vols. (New York: Christian Literature, 1887–94), 6:14.

6.37

Matthew 11:11—The Greatest Man Who Ever Lived?

The Gospels of Matthew and Luke record Jesus as indicating that John the Baptist may have been the greatest man who had ever lived—with one caveat.

Matthew 11:11	Luke 7:28
“Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”	“I tell you, among those born of women no one is greater than John; yet the least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.”

Cyril of Jerusalem (313–386), a theologian of the early church, emphasizes the point:

Even though Elijah the Tishbite was taken up to heaven, he was not greater than John. [See 2 Kings 2:11.]

Enoch too was translated but was not greater than John. [See Gen. 5:24.]

Moses was the greatest of lawgivers and all the prophets were admirable, but none greater than John.

It is not I who would dare to compare prophet with prophet, but their Master and ours who himself declared, “Among those born of women, there is none greater than John.”

But then Cyril adds this note: “Observe! Not ‘born of *virgins*,’ but ‘born of *women*!’”¹

So for Cyril of Jerusalem, John the Baptist can be regarded only as the “second greatest man who ever lived.” Jesus was not born of a woman (but see Gal. 4:4) but of a virgin, and that makes all the difference. (To follow the logic, we must assume that, for Cyril, a “virgin” was not yet a “woman.”)

Other New Testament interpreters would note that John’s preeminence endures only up to the advent of the kingdom of heaven.

The *least* in the kingdom are greater than him and so, obviously, the *greatest* in the kingdom—children and the childlike (Matt. 18:4), servants and slaves (Matt. 20:26–27)—must be greater still.

1. J. Ballie et al., eds., *Library of Christian Classics*, 26 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953–66), 4:93–94.

6.38

Matthew 13:31–32—Why a Mustard Seed?

(Comments from Church Tradition)

In all three Synoptic Gospels, Jesus tells a parable about a mustard seed.

Matthew 13:31–32	Mark 4:30–32	Luke 13:18–19
He put before them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; 32 it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.”	He also said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? 31 It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; 32 yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”	He said therefore, “What is the kingdom of God like? And to what should I compare it? 19 It is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in the garden; it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches.”

Most interpreters have assumed Jesus chose a mustard seed for this illustration because of the obvious difference between the size of the seed (about the size of a grain of salt) and the mature plant (a shrub the size of a small tree). He might have made a similar point in modern America with an acorn and an oak tree.

From the early church on, however, some interpreters have tried to find something specific about “mustard” to extract additional meaning from the saying. Further, the mere fact that a seed is buried before it produces growth suggested imagery of death and resurrection, either of Jesus’s followers or of Jesus himself.

Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–ca. 250):

The word which proclaims the kingdom of heaven is sharp and pungent as mustard. It represses bile (anger) and checks inflammation (pride). From this word flows the soul's true vitality and fitness for eternity. To such increased size did the growth of the word come that the tree which sprang from it (that is the Church of Christ now being established over the whole earth) filled the world, so that the birds of the air (that is, holy angels and lofty souls) dwelt in its branches. (*Fragments from the Catena of Nicetas, Bishop of Heraclea* 4)¹

Ambrose (347–397):

Its seed is indeed very plain, and of little value; but if bruised or crushed it shows forth its power. So faith first seems a simple thing; but if it is bruised by its enemies it gives forth proof of its power, so as to fill others who hear or read of it with the odor of its sweetness. Our martyrs, Felix, Nabor and Victor, possessed the sweet odor of faith; but they dwelt in "obscurity. When the persecution came, they laid down their arms, and bowed their necks, and being stricken by the sword they diffused to all the ends of the earth the grace of their martyrdom. . . . The Lord himself is the grain of mustard seed. He was without injury; but the people were unaware of him as a grain of mustard seed of which they took no notice. He chose to be bruised, that we might say: "For we are the good odor of Christ unto God." ("Sermon on 'The Grain of the Mustard Seed'")²

Also, “seed” can have sexual connotations, but would that be pressing the analogy too far? To speak of Jesus impregnating his bride, the church? Let’s see.

Peter Chrysologus (406–450):

Yes, it is true: a mustard seed is indeed an image of the kingdom of God. Christ is the kingdom of heaven. Sown like a mustard seed in the garden of the virgin’s womb, he grew up into the tree of the cross whose branches stretch across the world. Crushed in the mortar of the passion, its fruit has produced seasoning enough for the flavoring and preservation of every living creature with which it comes in contact. As long as a mustard seed remains intact, its properties lie dormant; but when it is crushed they are exceedingly evident. So it was with Christ; he chose to have his body crushed, because he would not have his power concealed. . . . The man Christ received the mustard seed which represents the kingdom of God; as man he received it, though as God he had always possessed it. He sowed it in his garden, that is in his bride, the Church. The Church is a garden extending over the whole world, tilled by the plough of the gospel, fenced in by stakes of doctrine and discipline, cleared of every harmful weed by the labor of the apostles, fragrant and lovely with perennial flowers: virgins’ lilies and martyrs’ roses set amid the pleasant verdure of all who bear witness to Christ and the tender plants of all who have faith in him. Such then is the mustard seed which Christ sowed in his garden. When he promised a kingdom to the patriarchs, the seed took root in them; with the prophets it

sprang up; with the apostles it grew tall; in the Church it became
a great tree putting forth innumerable branches laden with gifts.

(Sermon 98)³

1. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 10 vols. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1885–96), 2:578.

2. M. F. Toal, trans. and ed., *The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers: A Manual of Preaching, Spiritual Reading, and Meditation*, 4 vols. (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1958), 1:349.

3. E. Barnecut, ed., *Journey with the Fathers: Commentaries on the Sunday Gospels*, Year B (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1995), 90–91.

6.39

Authorship of Matthew's Gospel

The Testimony of Papias

The church historian Eusebius (260–339) claimed to have a statement from someone named Papias, who said, around 135, “Matthew compiled the sayings in the Hebrew language and each one interpreted them as he was able.” Eusebius took this as a reference to the book that we call the “Gospel of Matthew.”

On the basis of this, some people believe that this Gospel is written by Matthew, the tax collector who was one of Jesus's original twelve disciples and who narrates the story of his own call in 9:9 (cf. Mark 2:14). Most scholars think that this is unlikely because:

- This Gospel is written in Greek, not Hebrew, and is far more than a collection of “sayings.” Therefore, Eusebius probably was wrong in thinking that Papias's statement referred to this book in its entirety. Some scholars think that Papias was referring to the now lost “Q” source, which was incorporated into this Gospel.
- This Gospel is often thought to depend on Mark and/or Q for most of its information. Therefore, it is unlikely that it was written by an eyewitness with personal knowledge of Jesus.

- The theological concerns and perspective of this Gospel are generally considered to be those of a “second-generation” Christian rather than those of Jesus’s original disciples.
- This Gospel usually is dated after 70 (possibly after 85). It is unlikely that any of Jesus’s original twelve disciples were still alive at that time, not just because they would have to be fairly aged for the time but, more to the point, because we do not hear of any of them being alive at this time in writings of other early Christians a short time later (e.g., the letters of Ignatius of Antioch).

The Jewish Character of Matthew’s Gospel

This Gospel strives to show that Jesus was faithful to Judaism. He pays the temple tax (17:24–27) and limits his ministry to Israel (10:5–6; 15:24).

This Gospel shows unusual concern for the fulfillment of Jewish Scriptures throughout Jesus’s ministry.

This Gospel emphasizes the endurance of the Jewish law, saying it will remain valid until heaven and earth pass away (5:18). It recognizes that the scribes and Pharisees legitimately occupy Moses’s seat and that their instructions are to be followed (23:2–3). It omits a phrase from Mark’s Gospel that interpreted Jesus’s words as “making all foods clean” (15:16–20; cf. Mark 7:19).

This Gospel respects Jewish piety. It assumes that its readers practice fasting (6:16–18) and make the traditional Jewish offerings (5:23; 6:2; 23:23). It also assumes that they will be offended at the prospect of having to make a journey on the Sabbath (24:20). It is perceptive of Jewish sensitivities regarding use of the divine name, substituting “kingdom of heaven” for “kingdom of God” in most cases throughout the book.

This Gospel does not consider it necessary to explain Jewish customs such as the handwashing scruples dictated by the “tradition of the elders” (15:2; cf. Mark 7:3–4), the wearing of phylacteries (23:5), and the whitewashing of tombs (23:27).

This Gospel conforms at times to the professional style of writing used by rabbinic scribes. The recasting of the divorce question through the addition of the words “for any cause” in 19:3 (cf. Mark 10:2) and the addition of the exception clause to Jesus’s answer in 19:9 both follow typical rabbinic formulations. The form of the Lord’s Prayer in 6:9–13 suggests Jewish liturgical usage by its address, seven petitions, and use of the word *debts*.

On the basis of this, some people believe this Gospel was written by an unknown Jewish Christian who may have been a converted rabbi or scribe and who may therefore provide an oblique reference to himself in 13:52. The author sometimes is considered to be a Jew who believes that Jesus is the Messiah but who would still identify himself as being “within the walls of Judaism”; he thinks of himself

not as someone who has converted to another religion but rather as someone involved in a messianic movement within the ancient religion of Israel.

This view has supporters, but many modern scholars think that it fails to account for the level of hostility directed against the Jewish people and their leaders in certain passages in Matthew (see “The Anti-Jewish Character of Matthew’s Gospel” below).

The Non-Jewish Character of Matthew’s Gospel

This Gospel does not distinguish between the different parties of Judaism. It refers to “the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees” (16:12) as though the doctrines of the two groups were the same.

At times, this Gospel seems to misinterpret matters that would have been clear to any Jewish person of the age. The excessively literal fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9 in Matthew 21:7 indicates that the author did not understand parallelism, a typical characteristic of Hebrew poetry.

This Gospel does not reproduce some of Mark’s Semitic words, such as “Corban” in Mark 7:11 (cf. Matt. 15:5).

This Gospel refers to “the Jews” in 28:15 as though they are a group distinct from the disciples of Jesus and makes references to “their cities,” “their scribes,” and “their synagogues” throughout the

narrative, as though Jesus and his followers belong to some entity distinct from the Jews, for whom these institutions exist.

This Gospel has a universalistic strain that is inclusive of the non-Jewish world. In 13:38 the “field” of ministry is designated the “world.” In 24:14 Jesus prophesies that the gospel will be preached throughout the whole world as a testimony to the gentiles, and in 28:19 he commissions his followers to make disciples of all nations (gentiles).

On the basis of this, some people have suggested that this Gospel was written by a gentile Christian who had acquired a secondhand interest in the Hebrew Scriptures and in things Jewish.

This view has not held up well in recent scholarship. Most people believe that the aforementioned anomalies can be explained in terms of Matthew’s community being Hellenistic rather than Palestinian and in terms of the distinctions between Christian Jews (who believed that Jesus was the Messiah) and non-Christian Jews (who did not).

The Anti-Jewish Character of Matthew’s Gospel

This Gospel infers that the Jewish people have been rejected by God.

Jesus tells a gentile centurion that “the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into outer darkness” (8:12).

He tells the Jewish leaders that “the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to” another (21:43).

The Jewish nation as a whole is pictured as cursed for all time with guilt for Christ’s death (27:25).

The words of the Great Commission in 28:19 could be interpreted to mean “make disciples of all gentiles,” thereby excluding Jews from the sphere of Christian missions.

On the basis of this, some people believe this Gospel was written by an ex-Jewish Christian who has left the synagogue and now considers himself to be outside the walls of Judaism. This would explain the love/hate attitude that this Gospel has toward the Jews. Affection for things Jewish remains, but an irreparable separation has occurred. The future of the author’s community lies in the mission to the gentiles.

6.40

The Community of Matthew: Clues from the Gospel Itself

The community includes some Jewish Christians:

Jewish phraseology is used (“Son of David,” “King of Israel,” “righteousness,” “kingdom of heaven”).

Israel’s place in salvation history is emphasized (10:6; 15:24).

The abiding importance of Jewish law is stressed (5:17; 23:2–3, 20; 24:20).

Familiarity with Jewish tradition is presupposed (15:2; 23:5, 23, 27).

Christian missionaries are sent to the Jewish people (10:5–6; 23:34).

The community includes some gentile Christians:

Certain gentiles are cast in a favorable light (1:3, 5–6; 2:1–12; 8:5–13; 12:21; 13:38; 15:21–28; 24:14; 26:13).

The inclusion of gentiles in the kingdom of heaven is given a place in salvation history (21:41; 22:9–10).

Christian missionaries are sent to the gentiles (28:19).

The community is autonomous:

The pronouns “their” and “your” are used in reference to Jewish institutions, implying this community is separate from those institutions.

Distinctive terms are used for those who are “with Jesus” (“disciples,” “sons of God,” “servants,” “brothers,” “little ones”).

A structure for governing communal life can be discerned (16:19; 18:15–20).

Particular offices or roles for community leaders can also be discerned (10:41; 23:34).

The community is urban:

The word “city” (*polis*) is used twenty-seven times, “village” (*kōmē*) only four times (cf. Mark: “city” eight times; “village” seven times).

The community is prosperous:

Larger amounts of money are referred to than in the other Gospels (cf. Matt. 10:9 with Mark 6:8; Matt. 25:14–30 with Luke 19:11–27).

References to “the poor” are omitted or changed (cf. Matt. 5:3 with Luke 6:20; Matt. 22:9 with Luke 14:21).

Joseph of Arimathea is described as “a rich man who was also a disciple of Jesus” (cf. Matt. 27:57 with Mark 15:43; Luke 23:50).

The community faces trouble from without:

They expect to suffer persecution at the hands of the Jews

(5:11; 10:17, 23; 21:35–36; 23:34).

They expect to suffer persecution also from gentiles (10:18, 22;

24:9).

The community faces trouble from within:

They believe that some members will lose their faith and

become apostate (13:21–22; 24:12).

They believe that some members will hate other members and

betray them to their enemies (24:10).

They expect false prophets to lead some people astray (7:15;

24:11).

6.41

The Structure of Matthew's Gospel: Two Views

Most scholars recognize that Matthew uses a variety of formulas and structural devices to organize his Gospel.

The Fivefold Formula

1. "And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching" (7:28).
2. "Now when Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and proclaim his message in their cities" (11:1).
3. "When Jesus had finished these parables, he left that place" (13:53).
4. "When Jesus had finished saying these things, he left Galilee" (19:1).
5. "When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples, 'You know that after two days the Passover is coming'" (26:1–2).

The Twofold Formula

1. "From that time Jesus began to proclaim, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near'" (4:17).

2. “From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering” (16:21).

Three Summary Passages

1. 4:23–25
2. 9:35
3. 11:1

Three Passion Predictions

1. 16:21
2. 17:22–23
3. 20:17–19

Bacon’s Outline for Matthew

Benjamin Bacon proposes an outline for Matthew’s Gospel based on the fivefold formula as shown above. His outline does not assign structural relevance to the twofold formula or to the summary passages or passion predictions.

Preamble: Infancy Narrative (chaps. 1–2)	
Book 1: Discipleship (chaps. 3–7)	
	A. Narrative (chaps. 3–4)
	B. Sermon on the Mount (chaps. 5–7)
Book 2: Apostleship (chaps. 8–10)	
	A. Narrative (chaps. 8–9)
	B. Missionary Discourse (chap. 10)
Book 3: Hiding of the Revelation (chaps. 11–13)	
	A. Narrative (chaps. 11–12)

	B. Parable Discourse (chap. 13)
Book 4: Church Administration (chaps. 14–18)	
	A. Narrative (chaps. 14–17)
	B. Community Discourse (chap. 18)
Book 5: Judgment (chaps. 19–25)	
	A. Narrative (chaps. 19–23)
	B. Eschatological Discourse (chaps. 24–25)
Epilogue: Passion and Resurrection (chaps. 26–28)	

Kingsbury's Outline for Matthew

Jack Dean Kingsbury proposes an outline for Matthew's Gospel based on the twofold formula. His outline takes into account the "summary passages" and "passion predictions," but it does not assign structural significance to the fivefold formula.

Part 1: The Presentation of Jesus (1:1–4:16)

Part 2: Ministry of Jesus to Israel (4:17–11:1)—includes the three summary passages—and Israel's Repudiation of Jesus (11:2–16:20)

Part 3: Journey of Jesus to Jerusalem and His Suffering, Death, and Resurrection (16:21–28:20)—includes the three passion predictions

6.42

Salvation History in Matthew's Gospel: Two Views

Three chronological periods have been discerned:

1. time of Israel
2. time of Jesus
3. time of the church

The question becomes “What is the extent of continuity and/or discontinuity between these periods?”

John Meier stresses:¹

- Continuity between time of Israel and time of Jesus:
 - Jesus views the Jewish law as valid (5:17–18).
 - Jesus limits his ministry to Israel (10:5–6; 15:24).
- Discontinuity between the time of Jesus and the time of the church:
 - Jesus, after his resurrection, instructs his disciples to teach his commandments (rather than those of Moses).
 - Jesus says that the post-Easter mission (of the church) is to “the nations”—that is, no longer to Israel (28:19).

Jack Dean Kingsbury stresses:²

- Discontinuity between the time of Israel and time of Jesus:

The time of Israel is essentially one of prophecy; the time of Jesus is one of fulfillment (see the fulfillment citations throughout this Gospel).

The coming of Jesus marks a new development in the relationship of God and people: God is now “with us” (1:23).

- Continuity between the time of Jesus and the time of the church:

The disciples and others respond to Jesus during his earthly ministry the same way that Christians respond to Jesus during the time of the church: they worship him as the Son of God, they have faith in him, they call him “Lord.”

The time of the church is marked by the continuing presence of Jesus (18:20; 28:20).

Meier defines continuity and discontinuity in terms of *ecclesiological* issues, while Kingsbury defines continuity and discontinuity in terms of *christological* issues.

1. See John P. Meier, *The Vision of Matthew: Christ, Church and Morality in the First Gospel*, TI (New York: Paulist Press, 1979).

2. See Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew, Structure, Christology, Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975).

6.43

Matthew's Use of Mark (Box 6.2)

According to the dominant source theories, Matthew preserves about 90 percent of the stories and passages found in Mark's Gospel, but he edits this material in accord with certain principles. Studying these editorial changes is the work of redaction critics (see "Redaction Criticism" in chap. 3 of the textbook).

Organization

Some Markan material is moved about.

Examples:

- Five miracle stories are moved to Matthew 8–9, where other miracle stories occur.
- The mission charge to the disciples is related immediately after they are selected (Matt. 10:1–42; cf. Mark 3:14–19; 6:7–13).

Abbreviation

Details or characters that are not immediately relevant are pruned away.

Examples:

- the demoniac's chains and behavior (Matt. 8:28; cf. Mark 5:2–5)

- unroofing the tiles for the paralytic (Matt. 9:2; cf. Mark 2:2–5)
- the crowd and the disciples in the story of a woman’s healing (Matt. 9:20–22; cf. Mark 5:24b–34)

Sophistication

Casual or colloquial expressions are rewritten in the more polished Greek of the educated class.

Examples:

- Many instances of the “historical present” tense are changed (130 out of 151).
- Mark’s repetitious use of words such as “and” and “immediately” is reduced.
- Clear antecedents are provided to pronouns that lack them.

Accuracy

Instances of questionable accuracy are corrected.

Examples:

- “King Herod” (Mark 6:14) becomes “Herod the tetrarch” (Matt. 14:1).
- Reference to Abiathar as high priest in Mark 2:26 is omitted (Matt. 12:4; cf. 1 Sam. 21:1–6).

Contextual Relevance

Some changes make things more relevant to Matthew’s community.

Examples:

- Matthew omits Mark’s explanation of Jewish customs (Matt. 15:1–2; cf. Mark 7:3–4) because he is writing for Christians who are either ethnically Jewish or well acquainted with matters of Jewish tradition.
- Matthew often replaces the phrase “kingdom of God” with “kingdom of heaven” (e.g., Matt. 4:17; cf. Mark 1:15), because some Jews tried to avoid saying “God” out of respect for the sanctity of God’s name.
- Where Mark uses “village” (*kōmē*), Matthew frequently uses “city” (*polis*), because he is writing for an urban community removed from rural settings.
- Matthew adds “silver” and “gold” to Jesus’s injunction for the disciples to take no “copper” with them on their travels (Matt. 10:9; cf. Mark 6:8), because he is writing for a more prosperous community for which renunciation of “copper” might seem insignificant.

Character Portrayal

Matthew changes the way major characters are portrayed in the Gospel story, including Jesus, his disciples, and the religious leaders of Israel.

Jesus

- Questions that might imply a lack of knowledge on Jesus's part are omitted (Mark 5:9, 30; 6:38; 8:23; 9:12, 16, 21, 33; 10:3; 14:14).
- Statements that might imply a lack of ability or authority on Jesus's part are modified (cf. Matt. 13:58 with Mark 6:5).
- References to Jesus exhibiting human emotions are dropped: pity (Mark 1:41), anger (Mark 3:5), sadness (Mark 3:5), wonder (Mark 6:6), indignation (Mark 10:14), love (Mark 10:21).
- Stories that might seem to portray Jesus as a magician are omitted (Mark 7:31–37; 8:22–26).

The Disciples of Jesus

- “No faith” is changed to “little faith” (cf. Matt. 8:26 with Mark 4:40).
- The theme of not understanding Jesus is adjusted so that the disciples are merely slow to understand (cf. Matt 16:12 with Mark 8:21; Matt 17:9–13 with Mark 9:9–13).
- Unseemly ambition is ascribed to the mother of James and John rather than to the disciples themselves (cf. Matt. 20:20 with Mark 10:35).
- References to the disciples “worshiping” Jesus and calling him “Lord” or “Son of God” are added to stories taken from Mark (cf. Matt. 14:32–33 with Mark 6:51–52).

The Religious Leaders of Israel

- A scribe whom Jesus praises in Mark (12:28–34) is depicted in Matthew as an opponent who puts Jesus to the test (22:34–40).
- Friendly religious leaders such as Jairus and Joseph of Arimathea are no longer identified as religious leaders in Matthew (cf. Matt. 9:18 with Mark 5:22; Matt. 27:57 with Mark 15:43).

6.44

Expanding Mark: How Matthew and Luke Arranged Their Gospels

The Gospel of Mark tells the story of Jesus in two major phases:

1. the story of Jesus's adult life and ministry (1:1–10:52)
2. the story of Jesus's passion—the events leading up to and including his arrest, crucifixion, and resurrection (11:1–16:8)

According to the Two-Source Hypothesis, Matthew and Luke both had copies of Mark's Gospel and when they produced their Gospels they added material from Q and other sources (material that we call M when it was used by Matthew, and L when it was used by Luke).

But as these two evangelists went about expanding Mark, each of them had to ask, "Where should I put the additional material?"

Some decisions were obvious:

- genealogies and birth stories were added to the beginning (Matt. 1–2; Luke 1–2)
- resurrection stories were added at the end (Matt. 28:11–20; Luke 24:13–52).

All of that material would come from M and L.

But according to the Two-Source Hypothesis, Matthew and Luke also had copies of Q, which reported the teaching of Jesus, and they

also had other traditions regarding things that Jesus had said or done.

They probably did not know the chronology for any of this material—*when* Jesus had said or done these things—so there was no obvious place where the material should go.

- Matthew decided to break up the story of Jesus’s ministry by having him deliver five long speeches or sermons (chaps. 5–7; 10; 13; 18; 24–25).
- Luke decided to put most of the extra material into a new portion of the narrative, a midsection that relates a long journey of Jesus to Jerusalem (9:51–19:44).

One consequence of these organizing techniques is that Jesus’s teaching is set in different contexts in these two Gospels.

- In Matthew’s Gospel, the teaching of Jesus occurs in a somewhat academic context akin to a *classroom*: Jesus is the rabbi, instructing his disciples in thematic lessons.
- In Luke’s Gospel, discipleship seems more like an immersion experience—learning “on the job.” Jesus takes his disciples with him on a trip, and they learn from what he says and does along the way.

6.45

Theological Interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount

The Early Church

In the early church, the Sermon on the Mount was used apologetically to combat Marcionism and, polemically, to promote the superiority of Christianity over Judaism. The notion of Jesus fulfilling the law and the prophets (Matt. 5:17) seemed to split the difference between two extremes that the church wanted to avoid: an utter rejection of the Jewish matrix for Christianity, on the one hand, and a wholesale embrace of what was regarded as Jewish legalism, on the other hand. In a similar vein, orthodox interpretation of the sermon served to refute teachings of the Manichaeans, who used the sermon to support ideas the church would deem heretical.

In all of these venues, however, the sermon was consistently read as an ethical document: Augustine and others assumed that its teaching was applicable to all Christians and that it provided believers with normative expectations for Christian behavior. It was not until the medieval period and, especially, the time of the Protestant Reformation that reading the sermon in this manner came to be regarded as problematic.

Theological Difficulties

The primary difficulties that arise from considering the Sermon on the Mount as a compendium of Christian ethics are twofold. The first and foremost is found in the relentlessly challenging character of the sermon's demands. Its commandments have struck many interpreters as impractical or, indeed, impossible, particularly in light of what the New Testament says elsewhere about human weakness and the inevitability of sin (including Matt. 26:41b). The second and related problem is that obedience to these demands appears to be closely linked to the attainment of eschatological salvation (Matt. 5:20, 22, 29–30; 6:15; 7:2, 14, 19, 21–23); thus the sermon appears to present a theology of “works righteousness” that conflicts with the Christian doctrine of grace. The history of interpretation from the Middle Ages to the present reveals multiple attempts at dealing with these concerns.

Does the Sermon Present an Impossible Ethic?

Thomas Aquinas was one of the first to call attention to these difficulties and also to attempt a resolution. Aquinas suggested that the ethic of the sermon includes not only mandates for all Christians but also optional counsels for those who would strive for perfection (such as clergy and others who pursue religious vocations). Though influential in Roman Catholic thought, this view has been largely rejected by Protestants; it has been critiqued in Catholic circles as well. Protestant polemic has tended to exaggerate Aquinas's view, such that it is often said that the “Catholic interpretation” of the

Sermon on the Mount does not view its demands as applicable to the ordinary Christian. In actual fact, the two-level principle of interpretation has been applied selectively and sparingly in Catholic interpretation, usually with limited reference to individual passages (e.g., those that would be interpreted as commending absolute poverty or chastity).

Martin Luther stressed a distinction between enactment of the sermon's demands in personal and religious life as opposed to application within the social, secular sphere. Thus a Christian might practice nonretaliation in personal relationships, but if he or she is a soldier or law officer, the active resistance to evil that is dictated by common sense must be allowed to prevail. Some consideration of the distinction between personal and social ethics became standard for most interpretations of the Sermon on the Mount from the Protestant Reformation to the present day.

Numerous critics, however, have noted problems with this approach: such a distinction can negate the sermon's ability to address individuals who excuse unethical behavior as a necessity of political life or, indeed, impede its effectiveness at challenging social systems designed to promote values at variance with those that the sermon encourages. Exegetical interpreters question whether Matthew intended to present Jesus's teaching as personal ethics rather than as the ethic of the community (cf. Matt. 18:15–18, which emphasizes personal subscription to a community ethic); theologians also

question on philosophical grounds whether any individual action is ever without social consequence.

John Calvin sought to resolve the issue of the sermon's impractical demands by an appeal to canon. In keeping with a hermeneutical method that he called *analogia fidei*, Calvin insisted that many dictates that seem absolute within the sermon itself may be recognized as situational or relative when considered within the broad context of Scripture. Thus the Sermon on the Mount appears to prohibit all oaths (Matt. 5:34), but this is mitigated by Hebrews 6:16 and by Paul's habit of calling on God as witness to ensure the truth of what he says (Rom. 1:9; 2 Cor. 1:23; Gal. 1:20; Phil. 1:8; 1 Thess. 2:4). Calvin's general principle of "interpreting scripture in light of scripture" has been widely adopted in most confessional traditions, but again, many interpreters find its application problematic when it serves to dismiss the relevance of what the Matthean author (if not the historical Jesus) considered to be imperative concerns.

Radical Anabaptists rejected all attempts to domesticate the sermon's demands and insisted on literal obedience, even if that meant nonparticipation in a world that compromises Christ's ethic: a Christian cannot be a soldier (because of Matt. 5:39) or a judge (because of Matt. 7:1) or any official required to swear oaths of office (because of Matt. 5:34). This view always remained a minority position, but it has had prominent advocates such as Leo Tolstoy,

the Russian novelist, and Leonhard Ragaz, the father of Christian socialism. In the late nineteenth century, Tolstoy summarized the sermon's demands in a popular fashion as consisting of five key rules: be not angry, commit no adultery, swear not, go not to law, war not.

Ulrich Zwingli proposed a distinction between external and internal realms of application and emphasized that the sermon's main purpose was to form the "inner person." This idea did not attract significant support in the sixteenth century, but it was revived with considerable success three centuries later within the nineteenth-century movement called "Protestant liberalism." Adolf von Harnack, Wilhelm Herrmann, and others spoke of the kingdom of God as a present and inner reality, and so they read the Sermon on the Mount as more concerned with inculcating a certain disposition within believers than with prescribing literal behavior. Indeed, literal application of the sermon's demands is impossible and undesirable, but when read as a nonlegalistic "ethic of disposition" (to use Herrmann's term), the sermon bore witness to the transformed mental and spiritual orientation that marks people of godly character. This understanding was critiqued by Johannes Weiss as losing contact with the apocalyptic perspective of Jesus. Still, it influenced Rudolf Bultmann and other existentialist critics and continues to be expressed in modified or chastened terms to the present day.

Albert Schweitzer followed Weiss's lead and came to question the relevance of the sermon altogether. Schweitzer maintained that the radical demands of the sermon were supposed to have represented an "interim ethic": the sermon presupposes an imminent expectation of the end times and becomes impractical in contexts that have lost that sense of urgency. Martin Dibelius also couched the problem of interpretation in these terms and yet thought that the sermon could continue to provide some sort of eschatological stimulus for Christian ethics: even those whose vision of the future is not apocalyptic may be affected by knowledge of what a complete transformation of the world in accord with God's righteousness would bring.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, the notion that the Sermon on the Mount was predicated in its entirety on imminent eschatology was questioned and all but discarded by theologians who considered the attribution of an exclusively future outlook to Jesus unsustainable. Rather, Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God as both still to come (perhaps, but not necessarily in the near future) and as already present (in mysterious but readily identifiable ways). This modified understanding of Jesus's eschatology yielded a stance toward the sermon's ethic that continues to draw significant support among modern interpreters: the sermon presents the ethic of God's kingdom, and Christians seek God's kingdom (and its righteousness) by striving to live in compliance with the sermon's demands (6:33). To the extent that the kingdom is already present, they will find some success—sufficient to be salt for the earth and light for the world.

Their failures serve as reminders that the kingdom is not yet fully present and that God's rule over their own lives remains incomplete. Thus the sermon presents an ethic that Christians are to live into, striving to live in the present as they are destined to live for eternity.

Does the Sermon's Legalism Conflict with a Doctrine of Grace?

Martin Luther was particularly bothered by the sermon's tendency toward "works righteousness," and he sought to interpret the moral expectations of the sermon as manifestations of grace: one does not behave as the sermon indicates in order to earn God's favor; rather, the Christian who has been put right with God by sheer grace will show the fruit of God's salvation in a life marked by good works, such as those that the sermon describes. This understanding, dependent on Augustine, became fairly standard for interpretations of the sermon in most confessional traditions.

Protestant Scholasticism (post-Reformation followers of Luther and Calvin) radicalized the tendency to interpret the sermon in this light. In both popular and scholarly treatments, the sermon was made to serve the evangelical function of preparing people for the gospel by making them aware of their need for grace: since no human can keep the sermon's demands, those who try will be brought to despair and left to trust in naught but the mercy of Christ. This manner of reading the sermon remained prominent in many Protestant circles for hundreds of years (twentieth-century advocates included Carl

Strange, Gerhard Kittel, and Helmut Thielecke), but it was sharply critiqued exegetically by Joachim Jeremias (in his 1963 work, *The Sermon on the Mount*) and theologically by Dietrich Bonhoeffer (in his 1940 work, *The Cost of Discipleship*).

In the modern era, all attempts to read the Sermon on the Mount in a manner that would be compatible with a Pauline doctrine of justification have fallen on hard times. The critical era of biblical studies has allowed for more theological diversity within the canon, and many interpreters today would simply grant that the Sermon on the Mount assumes a soteriology that would not be acceptable from a Pauline perspective. This view has been bolstered by the work of numerous Jewish interpreters. The theological recommendation of Christian scholars is sometimes to value the sermon for its ethical teaching while regarding its understanding of soteriology as inadequate. To force any reading of the text from the perspective of what ultimately became orthodox Christian theology does not do justice to the theology of Matthew or the intentions of the historical Jesus.

6.46

Matthew's Beatitudes: A New Interpretation

Matthew 5:3–12 is one of the most famous passages in the Bible. It presents a series of nine “beatitudes” or blessings on people who are described by Jesus with distinctive phrases. The classic interpretation of the passage has been to identify the phrases that describe the blessed as *virtues* that God wants people to exhibit.

In an article written for *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*,¹ I propose a different interpretation, one that has come to be favored by many interpreters. I divide the Beatitudes into groups or stanzas in a manner that he deems more consistent with Jewish poetry. I then read only the second stanza as blessings for the virtuous. The first stanza (the first four beatitudes) is interpreted not as naming virtues to be rewarded, but rather as naming unfortunate circumstances that will be reversed when God's will is done.

What follows is a brief outline of my interpretation.

Structure of the Beatitudes

Matthew 5:3–10 is a unit, beginning and concluding with “Theirs is the rule of heaven.” 5:11–12 is an addendum, worded in the second person. Verses 3–10 may also be subdivided into two groups of four (vv. 3–6 and vv. 7–10), with each group containing the same number of words (in Greek). When divided, each set of four exhibits

parallelism, referring to the same group or type of people in four different ways.

Thus Matthew 5:3–6 and Matthew 5:7–10 each refer to a particular class of people who are blessed. Matthew 5:11–12 applies the beatitudes of both groups to the reader.

<p>³ “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. ⁵ “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. ⁶ “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.</p>	<p>⁷ “Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. ⁸ “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. ⁹ “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. ¹⁰ “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.</p>
<p>¹¹ “Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.</p>	

Matthew 5:3–6: The First Group

Who are the blessed?	the disadvantaged and the dispossessed
	the poor in spirit = the despondent; those who have no reason for hope
	those who mourn = the miserable; those who have no cause for joy
	the meek = the weak and vulnerable; those who are deemed lowly and insignificant
	those who hunger and thirst for righteousness = the victims of unrighteousness/injustice; those who earnestly desire for righteousness to prevail, so that they might be treated the way they ought to be treated (with righteousness/justice)

What is the	eschatological reversal
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blessing?	
	heaven rules them (an alternative translation to “theirs is the kingdom of heaven”)
	they will be comforted
	they will inherit the earth (have their fair share of the earth’s resources)
	their desire for righteousness and justice will be satisfied

In the rule of God announced and initiated by Jesus, the disadvantaged and the dispossessed will have what has been denied them. This *will* happen when God’s kingdom comes and God’s will is done; it *does* happen whenever God’s kingdom comes and God’s will is done.

Matthew 5:7–10: The Second Group

Who are the blessed?	those who do the will of God
	the merciful = those who exhibit the divine quality of peace
	the pure in heart = those whose motives for serving God are sincere and unselfish
	the peacemakers = those who actively work to eliminate the injustice that breeds contempt and conflict
	those who suffer for the sake of righteousness (or justice) = those who are so committed to God’s will that they are willing to suffer to see it accomplished

What is the blessing?	the accomplishment of God’s will
	they will receive mercy
	they will see God
	they will be called God’s children
	heaven will rule them (theirs is the kingdom of heaven)

The coming of God’s rule is itself the ultimate blessing for those who seek it. Those who commit themselves to the establishment of God’s righteousness are assured that it will triumph and that the things they strive for (peace, mercy, justice) will be realized.

The Link between the Two Sets

The first set (5:3–6) promises reversal to the disadvantaged. The second set (5:7–10) promises rewards to the virtuous. But there is a logical connection between these two stanzas:

- the virtuous are rewarded for enacting the blessings bestowed on the disadvantaged
- it is God’s will to aid the disadvantaged people of the world (that is why disadvantaged people are blessed)

Also:

- it is God’s will to aid the disadvantaged through virtuous people who allow God to use them in this manner (that is why virtuous people are blessed)

Matthew 5:11–12: Personal Application—and a Warning!

Who are the blessed?	you
	the disciples of Jesus
	the readers of Matthew’s Gospel
Note that “you” exhibits qualities of both groups above	
	you are despised, reviled, and

	persecuted, like the persons in 5:3–6
	you are so regarded because you do the will of God, like the persons in 5:7–10

Thus if “you” take the side of the disadvantaged, you will become one of them—the world does not discriminate between the oppressed and their advocates but curses them both.

What Is the Blessing? Identification with the People of God

God is on the side of the oppressed. If “you” are on the side of the oppressed, then you are blessed also because God is on your side. God also does not discriminate between the oppressed and their advocates but blesses them both—both come under the rule of heaven.

1. For a more developed presentation of this interpretation, see Mark Allan Powell, “Matthew’s Beatitudes: Reversals and Rewards of the Kingdom,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 58, no. 3 (July 1996): 460–79.

6.47

The Lord's Prayer

Early Christians treasured a prayer that they said Jesus had taught his disciples, and they made it part of their private devotional lives and liturgical worship services. Traditionally called “the Lord’s Prayer” or “the Our Father,” the prayer is preserved in three early documents: Matthew 6:9–13; Luke 11:2–4; *Didache* 8:2 (the *Didache* being a nonbiblical writing from the early second century). The prayer is very Jewish in form and content. Indeed, in Matthew, Jesus presents it in explicit contrast to the type of prayers said by gentiles (6:7).

The metaphorical identification of God as “Father” is typical for Matthew, occurring ten times in 6:1–18 alone (see also 5:16, 45, 48; 6:26, 32; 7:11, 21; 10:32, 33; 12:50; 15:13; 16:17; 18:10, 14, 19, 35; 20:23; 25:34; 26:29, 42, 53; 28:19). For Matthew, this image presents God as both a caring parent and an authority figure, as the one whose unilateral decisions are to be respected by the whole family of believers (cf. 23:9). By encouraging his followers to call God “Father,” Jesus urges them both to respect God’s authority and to trust in God’s generosity and providential wisdom.

The prayers for God’s name to be hallowed, for God’s kingdom to come, and for God’s will to be done are parallel petitions that state the same basic request three times in slightly different words. For

Matthew, the essential request is for God to bring to fulfillment what has begun with Jesus. The kingdom has already drawn near (4:17), Jesus and his followers are bringing God's will to accomplishment (5:17), and God's name is being glorified on account of them (5:16). Jesus's followers are to pray for the work of Christ to continue.

Three more petitions make simple requests of God, ones that Jesus deems appropriate for people to make at any time. The request for "daily bread" flows from an assumption that all followers of Jesus will embrace a simple lifestyle. Bread serves as a metaphor for life's necessities; Jesus's followers are to ask that God provide them with what they need, no more, but also no less.

The request for forgiveness of sins (literally, "debts") is traditional for Judaism. Jesus attaches to it a reminder that those who seek such forgiveness ought also to forgive others. To emphasize the point, Matthew quotes another saying of Jesus on this subject (6:14–15) and elsewhere records a parable that Jesus told to illustrate the lesson (18:23–35). Within the Sermon on the Mount, this need to forgive others becomes the only facet of Jesus's moral teaching deemed so important that his followers are to remind themselves of it every time they pray.

The next petition is easily misunderstood when translated, "Lead us not into temptation," since neither Matthew nor Jesus would have wanted to imply the possibility that God might tempt people to sin. Rather, the request is for God to guide Jesus's followers in such a

way that they will not experience trials that could test their faith (cf. 26:41). According to the parable of the sower (13:3–9, 18–23), such trials might take the form of hardship (“trouble or persecution”) or distraction (“the cares of the world and the lure of wealth”). Elsewhere, Matthew indicates that some trials are inevitable (18:7; 24:9–13). Thus the petition continues with the plea “Deliver us from evil” (or, “the evil one”). Jesus’s followers are to ask that they be spared trials whenever possible, and, when this is not possible, that they be protected from the potentially destructive consequences of such experiences (cf. James 1:2–4; 1 Pet. 1:6–7).

A well-known conclusion to the Lord’s Prayer (“Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen”; KJV) was not originally in the Bible. It was written by early Christians when the prayer came to be used in liturgical worship. Later, some copies of the New Testament began adding the conclusion to the text with the result that it is found today in a few English translations (including the KJV).

Primary Resources

Matthias, Philip. *The Perfect Prayer: Search for the Kingdom through the Lord’s Prayer*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2005.

Stevenson, Kenneth W. *The Lord’s Prayer: A Text in Tradition*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004.

Related Resources

Cullman, Oscar. *Prayer in the New Testament*. OBT. Minneapolis:

Fortress, 1995.

Karris, Robert J. *Prayer and the New Testament: Jesus and His*

Communities at Worship. New York: Crossroad, 2000.

Longenecker, Richard N. *Into God's Presence: Prayer in the New*

Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001.

6.48

Matthew 1:18–25—A Hymn to Honor Bethlehem

The poem “O Little Town of Bethlehem” was written by Phillips Brooks (1835–93), an Episcopal priest in 1868; his organist, Lewis Redner, set the poem to music and it became a well-known Christmas carol. The first verse is:

O little town of Bethlehem,
How still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by;
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting Light;
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight.

6.49

Matthew 2:1–12—A Carol about the Bethlehem Star

An English poem probably composed in the nineteenth century became a popular Christmas carol that we know as “The First Noel.” Different versions exist, including a version in the *Cornish Songbook* (1929) and one in the *New English Hymnal* (1986). As seen in the first stanzas below, the different versions maintain the same concepts in each stanza but employ variant phrases. The only major difference is found in the Coventry version of the hymn, which returns to Luke’s Gospel for its final stanza, with a visit to the manger (not mentioned in Matthew).

Cornish Songbook (1929)	New English Hymnal (1986)
O well, O well, the Angels did say To shepherds there in the fields did lay; Late in the night a-folding their sheep, A winter’s night, both cold and bleak.	The first Noel the angel did say Was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay; In fields where they lay, keeping their sheep, On a cold winter’s night that was so deep:
Refrain	Refrain
O well, O well, O well, O well, Born is the King of Israel.	Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel, Born is the King of Israel.

The main focus of the poem is on tracing the history of the Bethlehem star, which is only mentioned in Matthew’s Gospel. The first stanza of the poem (in either version) reports an appearance of that star to shepherds, something that is not mentioned in the Bible.

Thus “The First Noel” may be read as an example of Gospel syncretism: The story of Jesus’s birth in Bethlehem is told in the Gospels of Matthew (1:18–2:18) and Luke (2:1–20). The magi (“wise men”) are featured in Matthew’s story (but not Luke’s); the shepherds are featured in Luke’s story (but not Matthew’s). “The First Noel” wants to include both shepherds and magi—and it finds an ingenious way to do so. The connecting link (missing from the Bible) is the star, which the poet assumes both shepherds and magi must have witnessed.

6.50

Matthew 2:1–12—Visit of the Magi

Matthew's Gospel tells the story of magi (wise men) who came to honor the infant Jesus after he was born. The story served as inspiration for a famous poem by T. S. Eliot (1888–1965), "Journey of the Magi." This forty-three-line poem bears little resemblance to the text of Matthew 2:1–12. The poem describes the hardships the magi faced on their journey to see Jesus in the dead of winter, but it makes no explicit mention of the star that guided them or their interaction with King Herod. The poem ends with the magi contemplating the meaning of Jesus's birth:

Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly
... this Birth was
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.
We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation.¹

1. T. S. Eliot, *Collected Poems 1909–1962* (Faber, 1974).

6.51

Matthew 2:16–18—Slaughter of the Innocents in English Literature

Matthew's Gospel reports a horrible aftermath to the visit the magi paid to Jesus. Having heard from those Eastern visitors that a child had been born who was destined to be "king of the Jews" (2:2), Herod decided to take matters into his own hands:

When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

"A voice was heard in Ramah,
wailing and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children;
she refused to be consoled, because they are no more."

(Matt. 2:16–18)

The event is typically referred to as "the slaughter of the innocents" and it is often likened to the killing of Hebrew babies by the pharaoh of Egypt in the days preceding the exodus (Exod. 1:15–22). The parallel is especially pronounced since Joseph must rescue Jesus by taking him to Egypt: in the past, Jews fled from Egypt to the

Promised Land to escape a baby-killing monarch; now, that situation is reversed.

Numerous writers have offered allusions to the biblical story.¹

Henry V by William Shakespeare (1600): King Henry demands the surrender of Harfleur and assures its defenders that the horrors of war will come upon them if they do not relent:

Your naked infants spitted upon pikes
Whiles the mad mothers with their howls confused
Do break the clouds, as did the wives of Jewry
At Herod's bloody-hunting slaughtermen.

(Act 3, Scene 3, lines 38–41)

Tom Sawyer by Mark Twain (1876): When the title character of this novel tricks his friends into whitewashing a fence for him, the novelist engages in a bit of bizarre hyperbole, comparing Sawyer's victims to those of Herod: "While Ben [Tom's friend] worked and sweated in the sun, the retired artist [Tom] sat on a barrel in the shade close by, dangled his legs, munched his apple and planned the slaughter of more innocents."

"The Innocents' Day" by John Keble (1887): Keble, an English poet, published poems on various days in the church year. He juxtaposes the beauty of Luke's Christmas scene (with a baby in a manger) with the sadness that accompanies the same event in

Matthew's story, and from that juxtaposition he draws curious morals regarding the blessedness of people today:

Bethlehem, above all cities blest!
Th' Incarnate Saviour's earthly rest,
Where in His manger safe He lay,
By angels guarded night and day.
Bethlehem, of cities most forlorn,
Where in the dust sad mothers mourn,
Nor see the heavenly glory shed
On each pale infant's martyr'd head.

“Waking and Sleeping: Christmas” by Margaret Avison: The

Canadian poet Margaret Avison (1918–2007) wrote a poem that, like the one by Keble above, sought to juxtapose the typically peaceful image of Christmas with its horrible aftermath mentioned only by Matthew:

But hard on the manger vigil
came Herod's massacre . . .
. . . and Rachel's
heart then broke.

1. See David Lyle Jeffrey, ed., *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 717–18.

6.52

Matthew 4:1–11—Jesus Quotes Scripture to Satan (and Vice Versa)

The Gospels of Matthew and Luke record the story of Jesus’s temptation by Satan in the wilderness. Their versions are quite similar, though their orders of temptations differ.

Matthew 4:1–11	Luke 4:1–13
<p>Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. 3 The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” 4 But he answered, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”</p> <p>5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, 6 saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’” 7 Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”</p> <p>8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; 9 and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” 10 Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! for it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’”</p> <p>11 Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.</p>	<p>Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, 2 where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. 3 The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.” 4 Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’”</p> <p>5 Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. 6 And the devil said to him, “To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. 7 If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.”</p> <p>8 Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’”</p> <p>9 Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, 10 for it is written, “He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,’ 11 and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’”</p> <p>12 Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”</p> <p>13 When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.</p>

Numerous scholars would note the words “it is written” (or “it is said”) and, from this, they deduce a strategy for overcoming the devil’s snares:

The first thing worth noting is that Christ uses Scripture as a shield against [Satan], and this is the true way of fighting, if we wish to win a sure victor. (John Calvin, *Harmony of the Gospels* 1.135)¹

Satan discovers that while persuasive rhetoric had been powerful enough to defeat Eve (see Gen. 3:1–1–7), the “It is written” of scripture is more powerful still. Christ refutes Satan not with rational argument but with revelation.²

Also noticed at times is how Satan quotes Scripture to Jesus! In Matthew 4:6 and Luke 4:10, Satan cites a passage from Psalm 91:11–12 in an attempt to convince Jesus that he should trust God to preserve him from a foolish death.

This would inspire some memorable lines from William Shakespeare:

The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose.
An evil soul producing holy witness
Is like a villain with a smiling cheek,
A goodly apple rotten at the heart.
O, what a goodly outside falsehood hath!

The Merchant of Venice, Act 1, Scene 3

1. John Calvin, *A Harmony of the Gospels*, vol. 1, trans. A. W. Morrison (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 137.
2. David Lyle Jeffrey, ed., *Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 754.

6.53

Matthew 4:8–10—Satan’s Offer to Christ in Milton’s *Paradise Regained*

The Gospels of Matthew and Luke both record a story of Jesus being tempted by Satan in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1–11; Luke 4:1–13). In one portion of that story, after failing to entice Jesus with other temptations, Satan flat out offers Jesus “the kingdoms of the world” in exchange for worshipping him.

Matthew 4:8–10	Luke 4:5–8
The devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! for it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’”	Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, “To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’”

This story would serve as the primary inspiration for John Milton’s classic work *Paradise Regained* (1671):

Then the Tempter said,
 “I see all offers made by me how slight
 Thou valu’st, because offer’d, and reject’st.
 Nothing will please the difficult and nice,
 Or nothing more than still to contradict.
 On the other side know also thou that I
 On what I offer set as high esteem,

Nor what I part with mean to give for naught,
All these, which in a moment thou behold'st,
The kingdoms of the world, to thee I give
(For, given to me, I give to whom I please),
No trifle; yet with this reserve, not else--
On this condition, if thou wilt fall down,
And worship me as thy superior Lord
(Easily done), and hold them all of me;
For what can less so great a gift deserve?"

Book 4, lines 154–170

6.54

Matthew 5:13—Salt of the Earth and the Rolling Stones

In Matthew 5:13, Jesus tells his disciples, “You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.”

The British rock group the Rolling Stones recorded a song called “Salt of the Earth,” written by Mick Jagger and Keith Richards. The song appeared as the closing number on the group’s legendary *Beggars Banquet* album, which opened with “Sympathy for the Devil,” but also contained another biblically inspired song, “Prodigal Son” (written by Robert Wilkins).

Joan Baez and Judy Collins have recorded “Salt of the Earth” as a folk song, but it is usually identified as a gospel song and has been recorded by numerous gospel groups, including The Violinaires, whom Jagger and Richards identify as “The Rolling Stones’ favorite gospel group.”

The verse repeated as the third and sixth stanza is sometimes omitted by gospel artists. It seems to express a sense of distance between the singer and those whom the song wishes to honor, as though the composers recognize that they do not themselves belong

to those regarded as “the salt of the earth”—the latter are humble, working-class people, not wealthy celebrities or rock stars.

Jagger and Richards performed a version of the song in 2001 for a concert commemorating those who had died in the 9/11 terrorist attack on New York City. They changed the words of the third line to “Raise a glass to the good, not the evil.”

6.55

Matthew 7:1–2—Measure for Judgment

William Shakespeare’s 1604 play *Measure for Measure* takes its name from Matthew 7:1–2, which reads (in the KJV):

Judge not, that ye be not judged.

For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.

Critics often think the play owes more to the New Testament than just its clever title. John Margeson writes that Shakespeare makes the “measure for measure” concept central throughout the play. “Integrated with a traditional Catholic exegesis of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans,” Margeson says the play “provides a lucid commentary on extravagant legal mindedness of the ‘old Law’ sort, such as was evidently associated with certain Puritans in Shakespeare’s day.”¹

Many take the central theme of the play to be consideration of whether Christ’s dictum describes the way the world is or the way it should be. According to Margeson, Shakespeare sets forth a “larger and more merciful concept of justice, dependent not upon equally weighted retribution but upon recognition, self-awareness, and forgiveness, which prevails in the conclusion to the play.”²

1. John Margeson, “Judge Not,” in *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature*, ed. David Lyle Jeffrey (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 423.

2. Margeson, “Judge Not,” 423.

6.56

Matthew 8:24–33—Jesus Walks on Water

The story of Jesus walking on water is told in three of the four Gospels. We still possess a hymn written about this incident in the fourth-century.

Matthew 14:24–33	Mark 6:47–52	John 6:16–21
<p>By this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. 25 And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. 26 But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, “It is a ghost!” And they cried out in fear. 27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.”</p> <p>28 Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” 29 He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. 30 But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!” 31 Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” 32 When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. 33 And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”</p>	<p>When evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. 48 When he saw that they were straining at the oars against an adverse wind, he came towards them early in the morning, walking on the sea. He intended to pass them by. 49 But when they saw him walking on the sea, they thought it was a ghost and cried out; 50 for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.” 51 Then he got into the boat with them and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, 52 for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.</p>	<p>When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, 17 got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. 18 The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. 19 When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. 20 But he said to them, “It is I; do not be afraid.” 21 Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going.</p>

Prudentius (348–ca. 405) was a Roman Christian poet who lived in Spain and wrote numerous hymns based on biblical or theological themes. His meditation on the birth of Christ, “Of the Father’s Love Begotten,” remains a popular Christmas hymn in many churches to this day. Here is his hymn inspired by Jesus walking on the water:

He walks dry-shod upon the flowing tide
And bears upon the flood with footsteps sure.
He chides the winds and bids the tempest cease.
Who would command the stormy gales: “Be still,
Your strongholds keep and leave the boundless sea,”
Except the Lord and maker of the winds? . . .

Excerpt from “A Hymn on the Trinity”¹

1. Aurelius Prudentius, *The Hymns of Prudentius*, trans. R. Martin Pope (London: J. M. Dent and Co. Aldine House, 1905).

6.57

Matthew 10:16—“Wise as Serpents” in Twentieth-Century Literature

In Matthew 10:16 Jesus says to his disciples, “Be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.” The memorable similes have often been used to describe characters (sometimes ironically or humorously) in twentieth-century English literature.¹

***Then and Now* by Somerset Maugham** (1946): “He is goodness itself, but it cannot be denied that he is a little simple. He does not combine the innocence of the dove with the craftiness of the serpent” (chap. 18).

***Unnatural Death* by Dorothy Sayers** (1927): “He is conscientious but a little lackin’ in worldly wisdom—not serpentine at all, as the Bible advises, but far otherwise” (chap. 4).

***The Way of All Flesh* by Samuel Butler** (1903): “He had the harmlessness of the serpent and the wisdom of the dove” (chap. 28).

1. See David Lyle Jeffrey, ed., *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 839–40.

6.58

Matthew 10:34—Not Peace but a Sword

Jesus's words about bringing a sword instead of peace are preserved in Matthew 10:34: "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword."

Interpreters have usually insisted that Jesus was speaking metaphorically: the "sword" is a symbol for "that which divides."

Jesus's point is that his radical call to pursue love and justice will prove divisive.

Such an interpretation would make better sense of what follows in Matthew 10:35–36, where Jesus speaks of family members being "set against" each other (but not attacking or killing each other).

Likewise, Jesus tells a disciple who would defend him when he is arrested in the garden, "Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Matt. 26:52; but see Luke 22:36–38).

And, of course, a claim that he intends to incite military violence would seem out of place with his counsel regarding love for enemies and turning the other cheek (Matt. 5:38–45).

Nevertheless, the biblical witness that Jesus came to bring a sword rather than peace would be cited throughout Christian history to justify conquests, Crusades, and all manner of atrocities committed in his name.

The American poet Howard Nemerov was twice chosen Poet Laureate for the US Congress, and won both the Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award for poetry. One of his best-known works is the 1973 couplet, “Morning Sun” which centers around the concept of bringing peace instead of a sword.

6.59

Matthew 12:22–25—A House Divided

A house divided against itself shall not stand.

—Abraham Lincoln

Abraham Lincoln did not actually say the most famous thing he ever said. Or, better, he *did* say it, but he was quoting Jesus at the time.

In Lincoln's day, the saying was well-known and everyone would have recognized it as a quotation from Jesus. Lincoln used it as the essential text for a speech in which he laid out his view that the United States could not continue to be a country in which slavery was legal in some states but not in others:

A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this government cannot endure, permanently, half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved—I do not expect the house to fall—but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing or all the other. Either the opponents of slavery will arrest the further spread of it, and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in the course of ultimate extinction; or its advocates will push it forward, till it shall become lawful in all the States, old as well as new—North as well as South.

Lincoln was not president at the time he gave this speech. Indeed, he had not yet been elected to any public office, but was running for

a seat in the Senate. His advisers cautioned him to sidestep the extremely divisive issue of slavery but on June 16, 1858, he did exactly the opposite and laid out a position that would probably be unpopular with people on both sides of the issue.

He probably hoped that a “Jesus quote” would help; it didn’t. He was soundly defeated in the Senate race and pundits of the day credited that defeat to the “house divided speech.” Later, however, the mood of the nation changed, his speech was remembered, and he came to be regarded as a man who had been ahead of his time and who had been willing to speak the truth, even no one wanted to hear it.

A common verdict of historians on Lincoln’s “House Divided Speech” is that it cost him the Senate, but gained him the presidency.

6.60

Matthew 18:10–14—Lost Sheep

Jesus's parable of the lost sheep is told in Matthew 18:10–14:

“Take care that you do not despise one of these little ones; for, I tell you, in heaven their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven. What do you think? If a shepherd has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. So it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost.”

The parable (another version is found in Luke 15:4–7) inspired an 1868 poem by Elizabeth Clephane, “The Ninety and Nine.” The poem tells of the shepherd’s quest to recover the sheep in terms that clearly recall Christ’s passion and suffering for sinners. The second verse reads:

“Lord, Thou hast here Thy ninety and nine;
Are they not enough for Thee?”
But the Shepherd made answer: “This of Mine
Has wandered away from Me.
And although the road be rough and steep,
I go to the desert to find My sheep.”

It was discovered after the poet's death by the evangelist L. Dwight Moody, who was touring Scotland. Moody's music minister, Ira D. Sankey, set the poem to music and it became a beloved hymn for those who appreciated its piety and sentimentality.

6.61

Matthew 18:20—Where Two or Three Gather

In Matthew's Gospel Jesus tells his disciples, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them" (Matt. 18:20).

The poet John Greenleaf Whittier (1807–92) was an American Quaker who took these words to mean that Jesus's followers do not need the trappings of religion (buildings, rituals, creeds, clergy) to experience their Lord as among them.

In his poem "The Meeting," he does indicate the need for community (Pentecost was not a personal experience) but emphasizes the simplicity of abiding presence promised in Matthew 18:20.

One stanza from the lengthy poem reads:

God should be most where man is least;
So, where is neither church nor priest,
And never rag of form or creed
To clothe the nakedness of need,—
Where farmer-folk in silence meet,—
I turn my bell-unsummoned feet;
I lay the critic's glass aside,
I tread upon my lettered pride,
And, lowest-seated, testify
To the oneness of humanity;
Confess the universal want,
And share whatever Heaven may grant.

He findeth not who seeks his own,
The soul is lost that's saved alone.
Not on one favored forehead fell
Of old the fire-tongued miracle,
But flamed o'er all the thronging host
The baptism of the Holy Ghost;
Heart answers heart: in one desire
The blending lines of prayer aspire;
"Where, in my name, meet two or three,"
Our Lord hath said, "I there will be!"

("The Meeting," lines 173–94)

6.62

Matthew 18:21–22—Seventy Times Seven

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus has a conversation with his disciple Peter: "Then Peter came and said to him, 'Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?' Jesus said to him, 'Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times'" (Matt. 18:21–22).

Although the NRSV and other modern versions render the saying "seventy-seven times," the more traditional reading in Bible translations (including the Latin Vulgate and the King James Version) has been "seventy times seven times."

Interpreters throughout history have stressed that the number is symbolic for an indefinite, inestimable number of times—the point is not to forgive someone 77 times or 490 times, but to forgive them so completely as to not keep count.

Nevertheless, novelists as noteworthy as Emily Brontë and Sinclair Lewis have gotten mileage out of taking Jesus's words literally and wondering if especially irritating people might not transgress the supposed limit. In both of the following instances, it is preachers who go too far, one by preaching against sin, and the other by living in it.

***Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë (1847):** Nelly the housekeeper says to a preacher who yearns to denounce every sin known to humanity (from chap. 3):

“Sir, sitting here within these four walls, at one stretch, I have endured and forgiven the four hundred and ninety heads of your discourse. Seventy times seven times have I plucked up my hat and been about to depart—Seventy times seven times have you preposterously forced me to resume my seat. The four hundred and ninety-first is too much.”

***Elmer Gantry* by Sinclair Lewis (1927):** The dean of a theological seminary at which Elmer Gantry is employed delivers a verdict against the outrageous hypocrite (from chap. 10):

“The faculty committee met this morning, and you are fired from Mizpah. Of course you remain an ordained Baptist minister. I could get your home association to cancel your credentials, but it would grieve them to know what sort of a lying monster they sponsored. Also, I don’t want Mizpah mixed up in such a scandal. But if I ever hear of you in any Baptist pulpit, I’ll expose you. Now I don’t suppose you’re bright enough to become a saloon-keeper, but you ought to make a pretty good bartender. I’ll leave your punishment to your midnight thoughts.”

Elmer whined, “You hadn’t ought—you ought not to talk to me like that! Doesn’t it say in the Bible you ought to forgive seventy times seven—”

“This is eighty times seven. Get out!”

6.63

Matthew 19:13–15—“Suffer the Little Children”

A story told in all three Synoptic Gospels portrays Jesus scolding his disciples when they try to turn back people who want to bring their children to him for blessings. In the KJV, the memorable expression used in Jesus’s response was “Suffer the little children to come unto me” (in Elizabethan English, the word *suffer* meant “permit” or “allow”).

Text of the Gospel Stories in King James Version

Matthew 19:13–15	Mark 10:13–16	Luke 18:15–17
<p>Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put his hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them.</p> <p>But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.</p> <p>And he laid his hands on them, and departed thence.</p>	<p>And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and his disciples rebuked those that brought them.</p> <p>But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.</p> <p>Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.</p> <p>And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them.</p>	<p>And they brought unto him also infants, that he would touch them: but when his disciples saw it, they rebuked them.</p> <p>But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.</p> <p>Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein.</p>

“Children Brought to Christ” by W. M. Hutchings (1850): The Bible story inspired a sentimental hymn written by a London printer, William Medlen Hutchings (1827–76):

When mothers of Salem¹ their children brought to Jesus,

The stern disciples drove them back and bade them to depart:

But Jesus saw them ere they fled and sweetly smiled and kindly
said,

“Suffer little children to come unto Me.”

“For I will receive them and fold them to My bosom:

I’ll be a shepherd to these lambs, O drive them not away;

For if their hearts to Me they give, they shall with Me in glory live:

Suffer little children to come unto Me.”

How kind was our Savior to bid these children welcome!

But there are many thousands who have never heard His Name;

The Bible they have never read, they know not that the Savior
said,

“Suffer little children to come unto Me.”

O soon may the heathen of every tribe and nation

Fulfill Thy blessèd Word and cast their idols all away!

O shine upon them from above and show Thyself a God of love,

Teach the little children to come unto Thee!

1. Salem = Jerusalem

6.64

Matthew 19:30—Last Shall Be First (English Poetry)

In Matthew 19:30, Jesus says, “Many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.” A little later, in Matthew 20:16, he repeats, “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.” This saying of Jesus has become a favorite of preachers, politicians, prophets, and poets. To sample the latter, we may consider lines of poetry from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries:

“Poem 1720” by Emily Dickinson (1830–86):

Had I known that the first was the last
I should have kept it longer.
Had I known that the last was the first
I should have drunk it stronger.

“The Times They Are a-Changin’” by Bob Dylan (1963):

As the present now
Will later be past
The order is rapidly fadin’
And the first one now will later be last
For the times they are a-changin’.

Dickinson’s take on Jesus’s famous line seems whimsical—or, perhaps, fatalistic. Dylan preserves the intended meaning of social upheaval.

6.65

Lightning That Flashes from the East

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus warns his disciples about "false messiahs and false prophets will appear . . . to lead astray, if possible, even the elect" (24:24). Then he assures them, "As the lightning comes from the east and flashes as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man" (24:27).

The point seems to be that the consummation of the ages will be an event so grand that no one will be have to wonder whether it has occurred.

The reference, however, became a metaphor for redemption in general: those who are beleaguered should look to the horizon and watch for the lightning that flashes from one part of the sky to the other (cf. Luke 17:24).

"I Shall Be Released" by Bob Dylan (1967): America's iconic songwriter Bob Dylan used this imagery in one of his best-known songs:

I see my light come shining
From the west unto the east

The song was first recorded by The Band on their 1968 debut album, *Music from Big Pink*, then by Joan Baez, Dylan himself, and countless other artists, including many gospel singers.

Notably, Dylan got the direction of the lightning backward (from west to east, instead of the reverse). Perhaps he misremembered the Bible verse or maybe it just didn't fit his rhyme scheme. In any case, Dylan's line has become so well known that it is now commonplace to hear preachers and others talk about the lightning that flashes "from the west to the east" as a symbol of impending liberation.

6.66

Matthew 25:31–46—The Corporal Works of Mercy

Augustine (354–430) listed fourteen “works of mercy” divided into two categories: *the corporal works of mercy*, which benefit or respect the physical well-being of persons, and *the spiritual works of mercy*, which attend to nonphysical needs.¹ All are incumbent on Christians to perform as they are able.

Corporal Works of Mercy	Spiritual Works of Mercy
1. feed the hungry	1. instruct the ignorant
2. give drink to the thirsty	2. counsel the doubtful
3. clothe the naked	3. admonish sinners
4. house the homeless	4. bear wrongs patiently
5. visit the sick	5. forgive offenses willingly
6. ransom the captive	5. comfort the afflicted
7. bury the dead	7. pray for others' needs

The “works of mercy” became a standard part of catechetical instruction in the Roman Catholic Church and continue to be taught (and practiced) in many communities today.

Many historians say that Augustine derived the first six corporal works of mercy from Matthew 25:31–46, where Jesus indicates that similar deeds will determine one’s fate at the Final Judgment:

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left.

Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food [1st], I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink [2nd], I was a stranger and you welcomed me [4th], I was naked and you gave me clothing [3rd], I was sick and you took care of me [5th], I was in prison and you visited me [6th].' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food [1st], or thirsty and gave you something to drink [2nd]? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you [4th], or naked and gave you clothing [3rd]? And when was it that we saw you sick [5th] or in prison [6th] and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food [1st], I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink [2nd], I was a stranger and you did not welcome me [4th], naked and you did not give me clothing [3rd], sick [5th] and in prison [6th] and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry [1st] or thirsty [2nd] or a stranger [4th] or naked [3rd] or sick [5th] or in prison [6th], and did not take care of you?' Then he will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

Admittedly, the equation is not precise (visiting someone in prison is not quite the same as ransoming someone who has been taken captive). Augustine added the seventh corporal work of mercy, inspired by the example of Joseph of Arimathea in Matthew 27:57–60 and by the instruction of Tobit 1:17–19.

Support for the “spiritual works of mercy” can be found in numerous scriptural texts though they were not apparently derived from as singular a source as were the corporal ones from the text of Matthew 25.

1. See Augustine, *Confessions* 10.38,39.

6.67

Matthew 25:31–46—Sheep and Goats in the Chorus of a Pop Song

The alternative rock band Cake offers an obvious nod to Matthew 25 in their hit song “Sheep Go to Heaven” from the album *Prolonging the Magic* (Capricorn, 1988).

The verses of the song have nothing obvious to do with religion or the Bible—they describe the cynical attitude of someone who is in a bad mood or having a bad day, who doesn’t want to laugh or smile or go out on Sunset Strip.

There are some vague references to death, and then the narrator decides, “As soon as you’re born, you start dying / So you might as well have a good time.”

For some reason, these verses wrap around an insanely catchy chorus repeated over and over again: “Sheep go to heaven, / Goats go to hell.” The refrain alludes to Jesus’s words in Matthew 25:31–46 (see below), where he indicates the fate of persons at the Final Judgment. But what in the world do the sheep and goats have to do with the main lyrics to the song? The composer (John McCrea) has offered no explanation.

The verses seem to express reticence at fulfilling social expectations: laughing, smiling, going out on the town when one doesn’t feel like it). Instead, they seem to encourage doing whatever

one pleases: playing the panpipes, drinking some wine—ancient symbols of hedonism. The “sheep and goats” chorus, further, invokes an image of judgment—in this case, perhaps, an image of judgmental people who might approve of inauthentic social niceties and disapprove of people wanting to just be themselves. Further, sheep may be those who follow blindly, doing whatever is expected of them, while “goats” may be the social outcasts who don’t care about such approval and don’t fit it.

The narrator would rather be a goat judgmental people consign to hell than an oblivious sheep who gets praised to the heavens for not being disturbing.

This analysis is only my opinion. I have no privileged insight into the song, though I did work as a rock critic years before I wrote *Introducing the New Testament*. If my analysis is even remotely correct, the song borrows its judgment motif from Matthew’s Gospel in a generic manner, without allusion to the social justice theme that formed the basis for that judgment in the original vision of Jesus (Matt. 25:31–46):

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that

are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’ Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

7.0

Mark: Outline of Contents

- I. Jesus appears, preaching the kingdom of God with power (1:1–3:6)
 - A. Beginnings: John the Baptist (1:1–13)
 - B. Jesus’s ministry introduced (1:14–45)
 - C. Conflict with religious authorities (2:1–3:6)
- II. Jesus’s ministry in Galilee (3:7–6:6)
 - A. True followers of Jesus (3:7–35)
 - B. Teaching in parables (4:1–34)
 - C. Working miracles (4:35–5:43)
 - D. Conflict with his own (6:1–6)
- III. Jesus begins his final journey to Jerusalem (6:7–8:21)
 - A. Mission of the twelve and John the Baptist’s death (6:7–29)
 - B. Feeding and healing miracles (6:30–56)
 - C. Teaching about the law (7:1–23)
 - D. Healing and feeding miracles (7:24–8:10)
 - E. Foes and friends misunderstand (8:11–21)
- IV. Jesus heals blind eyes: teaching on discipleship (8:22–10:52)
 - A. Blind eyes opened (8:22–26)

- B. First passion prediction and attendant events (8:27–9:29)
 - C. Second passion prediction and attendant events (9:30–10:31)
 - D. Third passion prediction and attendant events (10:32–45)
 - E. Blind eyes opened (10:46–52)
- V. Final week in Jerusalem (11:1–16:8)
- A. Jesus teaches in the temple (11:1–12:44)
 - B. On times before the end (13:1–37)
 - C. Final acts of Jesus (14:1–42)
 - D. Jesus tried and condemned (14:43–15:47)
 - E. The empty tomb (16:1–8)
- VI. Later epilogue: Jesus appears (16:9–20)

Courtesy of *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, ed. Mark Allan Powell (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 601.

7.1

Content Summary: Expanded Overview of the Gospel of Mark

John the Baptist preaches in the wilderness and baptizes Jesus; the Holy Spirit comes upon Jesus, and a voice from heaven says, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” (1:1–11)

Jesus is tempted by Satan for forty days in the wilderness (in this Gospel we hear nothing about the content of those temptations). (1:12–13)

Jesus begins a ministry of proclaiming the good news of God: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news.” (1:14–15)

Jesus calls four fishermen to be his disciples: Simon (later called “Peter”), Andrew (Simon’s brother), and James and John (two brothers, the sons of Zebedee). (1:16–20)

Jesus casts a demon out of a man in a synagogue in Capernaum. (1:21–28)

Jesus heals Simon’s mother-in-law of a fever in Capernaum (where Simon lives). Then he heals so many others that he begins to attract crowds all over Galilee. (1:29–39)

Jesus heals a leper, imploring him not to tell anyone about it, but the leper announces it freely. (1:40–45)

Jesus heals a paralyzed man lowered through the ceiling to him in a crowded house, but first he tells the man that his sins are forgiven, which some scribes regard as blasphemy (since only God can forgive sins). (2:1–12)

Jesus calls Levi, a tax collector, to follow him. To the chagrin of religious leaders, he eats with Levi and other tax collectors. He tells them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician. . . . I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.” (2:13–17)

Jesus explains to Pharisees and disciples of John the Baptist why his own disciples don’t fast, likening his time with them to a wedding feast: they cannot fast while “the bridegroom” is still with them. (2:18–22)

Jesus justifies why his disciples pick grain on the Sabbath: “The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath.” (2:23–28)

Jesus heals a man who has a withered hand in a synagogue on the Sabbath, inspiring the Pharisees to conspire with the Herodians about how to destroy him. (3:1–6)

Jesus continues to heal people and cast out demons. The demons shout, “You are the Son of God,” but he orders them not to make him known. (3:7–12)

Jesus appoints twelve of his followers to be “apostles,” including Peter, James, John, and Andrew. (3:13–19)

Jesus’s family seeks to restrain him because people are saying that he has gone out of his mind. Also, scribes and Pharisees say that he casts out demons by the power of Beelzebul, the ruler of demons. Jesus says that these leaders are blaspheming the Holy Spirit (an unforgivable sin) and that his true family members are those who do the will of God. (3:20–35)

Jesus teaches the parable of the sower publicly to a crowd and then gives an allegorical explanation of it in private to his disciples. (4:1–20)

Jesus tells a number of other brief parables, likening the kingdom of God to a lamp, seeds that grow secretly, and a mustard seed (4:21–34)

Jesus stills a storm at sea. He rebukes his disciples for having been afraid and for having no faith. (4:35–41)

On the other side of the Sea of Galilee, in the area of the Gerasenes, Jesus casts a group of demons called “Legion” out of a man in a cemetery. The demons enter pigs, which run into the sea and drown. (5:1–20)

Jesus goes to heal the daughter of Jairus, a synagogue leader. Along the way, a woman with hemorrhages touches the hem of

his garment and is healed. Jairus's daughter dies, but Jesus raises her from the dead. (5:21–43)

Jesus returns to Nazareth to speak in the synagogue. The local people take offense at him, prompting him to say, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown." (6:1–6)

Jesus sends out the twelve to heal diseases, cast out demons, and tell people to repent; they are to take no money and must depend on others to provide for them. (6:7–13)

Jesus's ministry attracts the attention of Herod, who previously beheaded John the Baptist. The daughter of Herod's wife, Herodias, had danced for Herod; he offered to give her anything she wanted, and Herodias told her to ask for "the head of John the Baptist on a platter." (6:14–29)

After the twelve return from their mission, Jesus takes them on a retreat, but multitudes follow. He feeds over five thousand people with only five loaves of bread and two fish. (6:30–44)

Jesus walks on water to join his disciples, who are crossing the sea in a boat. (6:45–52)

Jesus continues to heal many people, including those who touch the fringe of his garment. (6:53–56)

Jesus's disciples are criticized for eating with unwashed hands. He responds by attacking the critics for their own hypocrisy and then by explaining that true defilement lies within the heart. (7:1–23)

Jesus is approached by a Syrophenician woman in the region of Tyre who wants him to heal her daughter. He is hesitant because she is not Jewish, but he grants the request after she tells him, “Even dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” (7:24–30)

Jesus travels through the Decapolis, where he heals a deaf mute by sticking his fingers in the man’s ears and saying, “Ephphatha!” which means “Be opened!” (7:31–37)

Jesus feeds a crowd of four thousand people with seven loaves of bread and a few fish. (8:1–10)

The Pharisees ask to see a sign from Jesus, but he refuses. (8:11–13)

Jesus’s disciples misunderstand a metaphorical reference that he makes to leaven and become worried that they don’t have enough bread. He reminds them of the miraculous feedings and upbraids them for their failure to understand. (8:14–21)

Jesus heals a blind man in Bethsaida by putting saliva on his eyes. The man’s vision returns in stages: after the first attempt, he sees men who look like trees walking; after the second attempt, he sees clearly. (8:22–26)

At Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asks the disciples who people say he is, and then he asks, “Who do you say that I am?” Peter responds, “You are the Messiah,” and Jesus warns them not to tell this to anybody. (8:27–30)

Jesus tells the disciples that he is going to be crucified, and Peter objects. Jesus rebukes him, saying, “Get behind me, Satan!” (8:31–33)

Jesus teaches that any who want to be his followers must deny themselves and bear the cross. (8:34–38)

Jesus says that some of those standing with him will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power. (9:1)

Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up on a mountain with him and is transfigured before them, appearing with Elijah and Moses in dazzling glory. A voice from heaven says, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” (9:2–8)

Jesus explains to the disciples that a prophecy regarding the return of Elijah has been fulfilled by the coming of John the Baptist. (9:9–13)

After his disciples are unable to do so, Jesus casts a demon out of a boy who has seizures. He tells the boy’s father, “All things can be done for the one who believes,” and the man responds, “I believe; help my unbelief!” (9:14–29)

Jesus predicts his passion a second time and resolves a dispute among his disciples as to which of them is the greatest by saying that the greatest is the one who serves the others. (9:30–35)

Jesus says that whoever welcomes little children in his name welcomes him. (9:36–37)

Jesus's disciples try to restrain an exorcist who they say is "not following us," but Jesus insists, "Whoever is not against us is for us." (9:38–41)

Jesus warns his disciples regarding the judgment to come on those who cause others to stumble; he calls them to rid their lives of anything that might cause their downfall. (9:42–50)

Pharisees test Jesus with a question about divorce. He insists that Moses allowed divorce because of "hardness of heart" but that what God joins together no one should separate. (10:1–12)

Jesus's disciples try to prevent people from bringing children to him, but Jesus says, "Let the little children come to me . . . for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs." (10:13–16)

A rich man goes away sad after Jesus tells him to give up all his possessions. Jesus says it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God. (10:17–27)

Jesus assures his disciples, who left everything to follow him, that they will receive abundant rewards, but with persecutions. (10:28–31)

After Jesus predicts his passion a third time, James and John ask if they can sit at his left and right in glory. The other disciples become indignant, and Jesus teaches again that greatness is achieved through service. He says, "The Son of Man came not to

be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

(10:32–45)

Just outside Jericho, Jesus heals a blind beggar named Bartimaeus, who follows him on the way. (10:46–52)

Jesus enters Jerusalem riding a colt, as a crowd of people shout “Hosanna” and strew clothing and palm branches in his path.

(11:1–11)

Jesus curses a fig tree because he is hungry and it has no fruit.

(11:12–14)

Jesus overturns the tables of money changers and shuts down the Jerusalem temple, which he calls “a den of robbers.” (11:15–19)

When Jesus’s disciples notice that the fig tree that he cursed has withered, he teaches them about the power of faith: the one who believes can move mountains, can ask for anything in prayer and receive it. (11:20–25)

Religious leaders ask Jesus by what authority he is acting, but he refuses to answer them because they will not respond to his own question regarding the baptism of John. (11:27–33)

Jesus tells the parable of the wicked tenants: the owner of a vineyard sends a series of servants, and then finally his son, to collect fruit from tenants, who beat the servants and kill the son. (12:1–12)

Pharisees and Herodians combine to test Jesus, asking him whether it is lawful to pay taxes to Caesar. He says, “Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” (12:13–17)

Sadducees test Jesus by asking him: If a woman was married to seven men in this life, whose wife will she be in the resurrection? He says there is no marriage in heaven, for people are like angels. (12:18–27)

A scribe asks Jesus which commandment is first of all. He says that the first is to love God, and the second is to love one’s neighbor as oneself. The scribe agrees with him, and Jesus says that the scribe is “not far from the kingdom of God.” (12:28–34)

Jesus stumps the religious leaders by asking them how the Messiah can be the son of David when David calls him “Lord.” (12:35–37)

Jesus denounces the scribes for being ostentatious and greedy and then calls attention to the generosity of a poor widow who puts her last two coins into the temple treasury. (12:38–44)

Jesus tells his disciples that the Jerusalem temple will be destroyed and then, on the Mount of Olives, launches into a long discourse on the end times, urging people to be ready at all times. (13:1–37)

The chief priests decide to have Jesus arrested and killed. (14:1–2)

At the home of Simon the leper in Bethany, Jesus is anointed for burial by an unnamed woman. His disciples consider it a waste of

expensive ointment, but he says that what she has done must be told throughout the whole world in remembrance of her. (14:3–9)

Judas agrees to betray Jesus, just before the disciples and Jesus eat the Passover meal together. Jesus identifies the bread and wine as his body and blood. He predicts his betrayal, and they go out to Gethsemane, where he prays that, if possible, God remove the cup from him. He is arrested, and his disciples desert him, including a young man who runs away naked. (14:10–52)

Jesus is put on trial before a group of priests who decide that he deserves death; meanwhile, Peter denies three times that he is a disciple of Jesus. (14:53–72)

Jesus is turned over to Pilate, and a crowd calls for Jesus to be crucified after Pilate gives them the choice of releasing Jesus or a rebel named Barabbas. Jesus is mocked by soldiers, who crown him with thorns and compel Simon of Cyrene to carry his cross to Golgotha (which means “place of a skull”). (15:1–24)

Jesus is crucified and mocked on the cross. He cries out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” before he dies. At his death, the curtain in the temple tears, and the centurion at the cross declares, “Truly this man was God’s son!” (15:25–39)

Many women are said to have been observing this from a distance, including Mary Magdalene, another Mary, Salome, and others; although they are mentioned for the first time here, we are now

told that they have been following Jesus since his early ministry in Galilee. (15:40–41)

Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Jewish council, provides a tomb for Jesus's body and sees that he is given a proper burial. (15:42–47)

After the Sabbath, the three women come to the tomb but find it empty. A young man dressed in white tells them that Jesus is risen, and they should go and tell his disciples and Peter. They flee in terror and speak to no one. (16:1–8)

7.2

Material Unique to Mark's Gospel (Box 7.4)

- parable of seed growing secretly (4:26–29)
- healing of man who is deaf and mute (7:31–37)
- healing of blind man of Bethsaida (8:22–26)
- sayings on salt (9:49, 50b)
- flight of young man in the garden (14:51–52)

7.3

Women in the Gospel of Mark

This chart shows the female Characters in Mark’s Gospel and other references to women, both real and fictional, along with cross-references to other Gospels.

Character/Episode	Mark	Matthew	Luke	John
Healing of Simon’s mother-in-law	1:29–31	8:14–15	4:38–39	
Concern of Jesus’s family: mother and brothers	3:19b–21, 31–35	12:46–50	8:19–21	
The daughter of Jairus	5:21–24, 35–43	9:18–19, 23–26	8:40–42, 49–56	
A woman with a flow of blood	5:25–34	9:20–22	8:43–48	
Jesus is called “Son of Mary”; reference to his sisters	6:3	13:55–56		[6:42]
John the Baptist’s death: Herodias and her daughter	6:17–29	14:3–12	[3:19–20]	
The Syrophenician woman and her daughter	7:24–30	15:21–28		
On divorce	10:2–12	19:3–12	[16:18]	
Jesus quotes the Decalogue: “Honor your father and mother”	10:19	19:19	18:20	
“No one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for the sake of the good news . . .”	10:29–30	19:29	18:29	
The case of a woman who had seven husbands	12:18–27	22:23–33	20:27–40	
The widow’s mite	12:41–44		21:1–4	
Apocalyptic discourse: children rise against their parents	13:12	[10:21]	21:16	
“Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing . . .”	13:17	24:19	21:23	

Anointing in Bethany: anonymous woman	14:3–9	26:6–13	[7:36–50]	12:1–8
Peter's denial: the serving girl	14:66–72	26:69–75	22:56–62	18:25–27
Women at the cross: Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James and Joses, and Salome	15:40–41	27:55–56	23:49	19:25b– 27
Women see where Jesus is buried	15:47	27:61	23:55–56	
Women go to Jesus's tomb	16:1–8	28:1–8	24:1–11	20:1–2, 11–13

7.4

Worship in the Gospel of Mark

Events

Crowds glorify (*doxazō*) God after Jesus heals a paralytic (2:12).

A demoniac worships (*proskyneō*) Jesus before the demon is exorcized (5:6).

Soldiers worship (*proskyneō*) Jesus in jest (15:19).

Sayings

Jesus applies to religious leaders the Scripture that says, “This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship (*sebomai*) me, teaching human precepts as doctrines” (7:6–7).

7.5

Mark in the Revised Common Lectionary

Text	Content	Series	Liturgical Occasion	Calendar Date
1:1–8	Ministry of John the Baptist	B	Advent 2	3 Sundays before Dec. 25
1:4–11	Baptism of Jesus	B	Epiphany 1	Jan. 7–13
1:9–15	Baptism of Jesus	B	Lent 1	6 Sundays before Easter
1:14–20	Call of disciples	B	Epiphany 3	Jan. 21–27
1:21–28	Exorcism in Capernaum	B	Epiphany 4	Jan. 28–Feb. 3
1:29–39	Ministry of healing	B	Epiphany 5	Feb. 4–10
1:40–45	Jesus heals leper	B	Epiphany 6	Feb. 11–17
2:1–12	Jesus heals paralytic	B	Epiphany 7	Feb. 18–24
2:13–22	Eating with sinners; fasting	B	Epiphany 8	Feb. 25–March 1
2:13–22	Eating with sinners; fasting	B	Lectionary 8	May 24–May 28
2:23–3:6	Sabbath laws	B	Lectionary 9	May 29–June 4
3:20–35	Source of Jesus's power	B	Lectionary 10	June 5–11
4:26–34	Parables of the kingdom	B	Lectionary 11	June 12–18
4:35–41	Jesus calms storm at sea	B	Lectionary 12	June 19–25
5:21–43	Healing of woman and girl	B	Lectionary 13	June 26–Jul 2
6:1–13	Jesus rejected in Nazareth	B	Lectionary 14	July 3–9
6:14–29	Murder of John the Baptist	B	Lectionary 15	July 10–16
6:30–34, 53–56	Compassion on the crowd	B	Lectionary 16	July 17–23
7:1–8, 14–15, 21–23	Teaching on true defilement	B	Lectionary 22	Aug. 28–Sept. 3
7:24–37	Syrophoenician woman; healing of deaf man	B	Lectionary 23	Sept. 4–10

8:27–38	Confession and rebuke of Peter	B	Lectionary 24	Sept. 11–17
8:31–38	Rebuke of Peter	B	Lent 2	5 Sundays before Easter
9:2–9	Transfiguration of Jesus	B	Transfiguration	7 Sundays before Easter
9:30–37	First passion prediction	B	Lectionary 25	Sept. 18–24
9:38–50	Freelance ministers	B	Lectionary 26	Sept. 25–Oct. 10
10:2–16	Divorce, children	B	Lectionary 27	Oct. 2–8
10:17–31	Rich man	B	Lectionary 28	Oct. 9–15
10:35–45	Disciples want best seats	B	Lectionary 29	Oct. 16–22
10:46–52	Healing of blind Bartimaeus	B	Lectionary 30	Oct. 23–29
12:28–34	Two greatest commandments	B	Lectionary 31	Oct. 30–Nov 5
12:38–44	Rich scribes and poor widow	B	Lectionary 32	Nov. 6–12
13:1–8	Signs of the end	B	Lectionary 33	Nov. 13–19
13:24–37	Coming of the Son of Man	B	Advent 1	4 Sundays before Dec. 25
15:1–39 (40–47)	Jesus condemned, crucified	B	Passion Sunday	1 Sunday before Easter
16:1–8	Resurrection of Jesus	B	Easter Day	Easter

7.6

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Eerdmans, 1974.
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Hendrickson, 2002.

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Achtemeier, Paul J. *Mark*. 2nd ed. PC. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986.

Redaction-critical approach that surveys literary-critical studies in a chapter on Mark as literature; served as the standard introduction to Mark for more than a decade.

Ambrozic, Aloysius M. *The Hidden Kingdom: A Redaction-Critical Study of the References to the Kingdom in Mark's Gospel*.

CBQMS 2. Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association, 1972. The kingdom of God in Mark is future, yet already present; hidden, yet inevitably to be revealed at the end of time. A careful redaction-critical study of this important Markan theme.

Anderson, Janice Capel, and Stephen D. Moore. *Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*. 2nd ed. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007. Illustrates different critical approaches to Mark's Gospel: narrative, reader-response, deconstructive, feminist, social, postcolonial, cultural, and orality.

Aus, Roger David. *My Name Is Legion: Palestinian Judaic Traditions in Mark 5:1–20 and Other Gospel Texts*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2003.

Barta, Karen A. *The Gospel of Mark*. MBS 9. Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1988. Examines selected themes in Mark,

including prayer, kingdom, power, healing, blindness, and discipleship.

Barton, Stephen. *Discipleship and Family Ties in Mark and Matthew*.

SNTSMS 80. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Beck, Robert R. *Nonviolent Story: Narrative Conflict Resolution in the Gospel of Mark*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000.

Best, Ernest. *Disciples and Discipleship. Studies in the Gospel according to Mark*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986. A collection of articles and essays focusing on Mark 8:27–10:45. Supports the thesis that Mark's portrayal of the disciples is intended to build up his community in their faith rather than defend it from heresy.

———. *Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark*.

JSNTSup 4. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981. A study in redaction-criticism that explores the theme of discipleship under three main headings: the disciple and the cross, the disciple and the world, the disciple in the community.

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accomplishment primarily as the redemption of humanity from sin rather than, as is sometimes thought, as a cosmic defeat of Satan.

Bilezikian, Gilbert. *The Liberated Gospel: A Comparison of the Gospel of Mark and Greek Tragedy*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1977. Tries to show that Mark's Gospel contains the essential elements for tragedy as outlined by Aristotle in his *Poetics*.

Black, C. Clifton. *Mark: Images of an Apostolic Interpreter*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994. A comprehensive study of the figure of John Mark in the New Testament and of the tradition associating him with the authorship of Mark's Gospel.

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Blevins, James. *The Messianic Secret in Markan Research, 1901–1976*. Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1981. A historical survey of scholarship on this very important subject for Markan studies.

Blount, Brian K. *Go Preach! Mark's Kingdom Message and the Black Church Today*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000.

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- . *Jesus's Defeat of Death: Persuading Mark's Early Readers*. SNTSMS 125. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Booth, Roger. *Jesus and the Laws of Purity: Tradition History and Legal History in Mark 7*. JSNTSup 13. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986. A historical study of the legal traditions involved in this passage, which concludes that Jesus did not deny the concept of cultic purity absolutely but only relativized that concept in comparison with ethical purity.
- Boring, M. Eugene. *Truly Human/Truly Divine: Christological Language and the Gospel Form*. St. Louis: CBP Press, 1984. Written for the nonspecialist; shows how the Gospel, as a literary form, incorporates within it a double image of Jesus: Jesus is (like us) weak, the crucified man from Nazareth; he is (not like us) strong, the powerful Son of God.
- Boucher, Madeleine. *The Mysterious Parable: A Literary Study*. CBQMS 6. Washington DC: Catholic Biblical Association, 1977. Appeals to understand parables as a class of literature, then deals with Mark's theory of parables in particular and relates this to his theme of mystery.
- Broadhead, Edwin K. *Teaching with Authority: Miracles and Christology in the Gospel of Mark*. JSNTSup 74. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1974.

Brock, Rita Nakashima. *Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic*

Power. New York: Crossroad, 1988. Interprets stories of Christian origin in Mark's Gospel from the perspective of feminist, relational theology; discovers in the miracle and passion stories a source of "erotic" (i.e., heart-based) power that is the basis of life and community.

Bryan, Christopher. *A Preface to Mark: Notes on the Gospel in Its Literary and Cultural Settings*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Burkett, Delbert. *Rethinking the Gospel Sources: From Proto-Mark to Mark*. New York: T&T Clark International, 2004.

Camery-Hogatt, Jerry. *Irony in Mark's Gospel: Text and Subtext*. SNTSMS 72. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Collins, Adela Yarbro. *The Beginning of the Gospel: Probing of Mark in Context*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992.

Cook, Michael. *Mark's Treatment of the Jewish Leaders*. NovTSup 51. Leiden: Brill, 1978. A redactional study of Jesus's opponents in Mark that is primarily concerned with uncovering historical insights regarding the evangelist and his community.

Crossley, James G. *The Date of Mark's Gospel: Insight from the Law in Earliest Christianity*. New York: T&T Clark International, 2004.

Croy, Clayton. *The Mutilation of Mark's Gospel*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2003. A sustained argument in support of the thesis that the original ending of Mark's Gospel has been lost, with an

additional proposal that the beginning of the Gospel may have been lost as well.

Danove, Paul L. *The Rhetoric of Characterization of God, Jesus, and Jesus's Disciples in the Gospel of Mark*. JSNTSup 290. London: T&T Clark, 2005.

Dart, John. *Decoding Mark*. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2003.

Dewey, Joanna. *Markan Public Debate: Literary Technique, Concentric Structure, and Theology in Mark 2:1–3:6*. SBLDS 48. Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1980. A rhetorical-critical study that examines the overall structure of Mark 2:1–3:6 and the literary techniques according to which it was composed so as to understand both the interrelationships among the various parts of the section and its meaning as a whole.

Donahue, John R. *Are You the Christ? The Trial Narrative in the Gospel of Mark*. SBLDS 10. Missoula, MT: Society of Biblical Literature, 1973. A redactional analysis of this important section of Mark's Gospel and its relationship to the work as a whole; special emphasis is given to the temple theme and to Christology.

———. *The Theology and Setting of Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark*. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1981. A brief redactional study relating Mark's portrayal of the disciples to concerns in the evangelist's own community.

- Dowd, Sharyn Echols. *Prayer, Power, and the Problem of Suffering: Mark 11:23–25 in the Context of Markan Theology*. SBLDS 105. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988. An extensive analysis of Mark's theology of prayer.
- Driggers, Ira Brent. *Following God through Mark: Theological Tension in the Second Gospel*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007. A study of the activity of God in Mark's Gospel, including God's work through Jesus and apart from Jesus.
- Farmer, William. *The Last Twelve Verses of Mark*. SNTSMS 25. London: Cambridge University Press, 1974. A study of the evidence for and against the genuineness of Mark 16:9–20; concludes that the verses should be considered part of Mark's Gospel.
- Fowler, Robert M. *Let the Reader Understand: Reader-Response Criticism and the Gospel of Mark*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991. Examines the rhetoric of Mark's Gospel with an emphasis on those features that allow interpretations that are intentionally ambiguous.
- . *Loaves and Fishes: The Function of the Feeding Stories in the Gospel of Mark*. SBLDS 54. Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981. The major thesis of this investigation: the story of the feeding of the five thousand is a Markan composition. A literary-critical study; also contains a chapter on reader-response and on the implied reader of Mark.

- Fullmer, Paul. *Resurrection in Mark's Literary-Historical Perspective*. LNTS 360. London: T&T Clark, 2007.
- Garrett, Susan R. *The Temptation of Jesus in Mark's Gospel*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.
- Gaventa, Beverly Roberts, and Patrick D. Miller, eds. *The Ending of Mark and the Ends of God: Essays in Memory of Donald Harrisville Juel*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005.
- Geddert, Timothy J. *Watchwords: Mark 13 in Markan Eschatology*. JSNTSup 26. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989. Interprets Mark's eschatology from the standpoint of epistemology, arguing that Mark is more concerned to teach his readers how to know than what to know.
- Geyer, Douglas W. *Fear, Anomaly, and Uncertainty in the Gospel of Mark*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2001.
- Hamerton-Kelly, Robert. *The Gospel and the Sacred: Poetics of Violence in Mark*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994.
- Hanson, James S. *The Endangered Promises: Conflict in Mark*. SBLDS 171. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000.
- Hatina, Thomas. *In Search of a Context: The Function of Scripture in Mark's Narrative*. JSNTSup 232. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002.
- Henderson, Suzanne Watts. *Christology and Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark*. SNTSMS 135. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Hengel, Martin. *Studies in the Gospel of Mark*. Philadelphia:

Fortress, 1985. A collection of three essays. Concentrates in the main on the historical origins of Mark's Gospel; argues for a reappropriation of the traditional views that the Gospel was written in Rome in 69 and contains materials handed down by Peter through John Mark, referred to in Acts 12.

Hooker, Morna D. *The Message of Mark*. London: Epworth, 1983.

Attempts to delineate the unique perspective of Mark's community concerning Christology and discipleship.

———. *The Son of Man in Mark*. Montreal: McGill University Press,

1967. Studies the use of the term "Son of Man" in the Old Testament and intertestamental literature and then examines all of the occurrences in Mark; argues for a coherent pattern in Mark's use of the term.

Horsley, Richard A. *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001.

Horsley, Richard A., Jonathan Draper, and John Miles Foley, eds.

Performing the Gospel: Orality, Memory, and Mark.

Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006.

Incigneri, Brian J. *The Gospel to the Romans: The Setting and Rhetoric of Mark's Gospel*. BIS 65. Leiden: Brill, 2003.

Iverson, Kelly R. *Gentiles in the Gospel of Mark: "Even the Dogs under the Table Eat the Children's Crumbs."* LNTS 339.

London: T&T Clark, 2007.

Juel, Donald H. *A Master of Surprise: Mark Interpreted*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994.

———. *Messiah and Temple: The Trial of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark*. SBLDS 31. Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977. An analysis of the problem represented by the significant role played by Jesus's prediction of the temple's destruction in his trial, and the virtual insignificance of the temple in the rest of Mark's narrative.

Kealy, Seán P. *Mark's Gospel: A History of Its Interpretation*. New York: Paulist Press, 1982. A sweeping historical survey of Markan scholarship from the first centuries to the present; covers the modern era of form and redaction criticism. Its unique contribution: a review of little-known works from earlier periods.

Kee, Howard Clark. *Community of the New Age: Studies in Mark's Gospel*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977. Locates the origins of Mark's Gospel in rural and small-town Syria, and then regards the Gospel as written in the late 60s on the model of Jewish apocalyptic writings.

Kelber, Werner H. *The Kingdom in Mark: A New Place and a New Time*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974. Studies Mark's concept of the "kingdom of God" in reference to a proposed reconstruction of Christian community following the destruction of Jerusalem in 70. Dates the Gospel after this event and states that the event precipitated its production.

- . *Mark's Story of Jesus*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979. An interpretive retelling of Mark's story of the life and death of Jesus, understood as a journey beginning in Galilee and ending in Jerusalem. Espouses the view, long debated by scholars, that Mark depicts the disciples at the close of his story as permanently alienated from Jesus.
- . *The Oral and the Written Gospel: The Hermeneutics of Speaking and Writing in the Synoptic Tradition, Mark, Paul, and Q*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983. Develops the thesis that Mark, by putting the Gospel into a written form, put an end to the creative development that had characterized it in the oral stage.
- , ed. *The Passion in Mark: Studies on Mark 14–16*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976. A collection of redaction-critical essays; investigates each pericope in Mark's passion account in terms both of the role that it plays within the passion account itself and of the thematic links that it exhibits to other parts of the narrative.
- Kermode, Frank. *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979. An examination of Mark by a literary critic rather than a biblical scholar; questions whether it is possible to find any unity of coherence intended by the author of the Markan narrative. Written from the perspective that one can find no coherence to life itself, but contains scattered insights into Mark along the way.

Kingsbury, Jack Dean. *The Christology of Mark's Gospel*.

Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983. Uses literary method to reappraise Mark's portrait of Jesus. After brief chapters on the "messianic secret" and recent approaches to Mark's understanding of Jesus, shows how Mark, in the course of his story, gradually unveils the identity of Jesus. A separate chapter deals with the special way in which "the Son of Man" is used.

———. *Conflict in Mark: Jesus, Disciples, Authorities*. Minneapolis:

Fortress, 1989. A literary study of Mark as narrative; focuses on the story lines of the three most important characters in the narrative.

Kinukawa, Hisako. *Women and Jesus in Mark: A Japanese Feminist*

Perspective. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994.

Levine, Amy-Jill, ed. *A Feminist Companion to Mark*. FCNTECW 2.

Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000.

Mack, Burton. *A Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins*.

Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988. A study of the social setting of Mark's Gospel proposing that Mark exercised a considerable amount of creativity in his presentation of Jesus traditions in order to vindicate those followers of Jesus who had been expelled from the synagogues.

Magness, J. Lee. *Sense and Absence: Structure and Suspension in*

the Ending of Mark's Gospel. SBLSS. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986. A study of the literary significance and effect of the final

verse of Mark's Gospel in light of "suspended endings"

elsewhere in the Bible and in other ancient literature.

Malbon, Elizabeth Struthers. *Hearing Mark: A Listener's Guide*.

Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2002.

———. *In the Company of Jesus: Characters in Mark's Gospel*.

Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000.

———. *Narrative Space and Mythic Meaning in Mark*. San Francisco:

Harper & Row, 1986. Illuminates Mark's Gospel story by

investigating the spatial references found in it: heaven versus

earth, land versus sea, Jewish homeland versus foreign land,

Galilee versus Judea, isolated areas versus inhabited areas,

house versus synagogue, Mount of Olives versus temple, and

tomb versus mountain.

Maloney, Elliott. *Jesus's Urgent Message for Today: The Kingdom of*

God in Mark's Gospel. New York: Continuum, 2004.

Marcus, Joel. *The Mystery of the Kingdom of God*. SBLDS 90.

Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986. A redaction-critical analysis of

Mark's parable chapter whose thesis is that whereas the stress

in 4:3–20 is on the hiddenness of the kingdom, in 4:21–32 it is

on the kingdom's moving from hiddenness to manifestation.

Martin, Ralph P. *Mark: Evangelist and Theologian*. Grand Rapids:

Zondervan, 1973. Deals with the origins of Mark's Gospel so as

to understand it in light of them. By telling of Jesus's suffering

messiahship, Mark gives encouragement to his own persecuted

church in Rome and summons it to faithful discipleship.

Marxsen, Willi. *Mark the Evangelist: Studies on the Redaction*

History of the Gospel. Translated by James Boyce et al. 1956.

Reprint, Nashville: Abingdon, 1969. Generally credited with inaugurating the redaction-critical approach to Mark's Gospel.

The discussion of this approach in the introduction is classic.

Matera, Frank J. *The Kingship of Jesus: Composition and Theology*

in Mark 15. SBLDS 66. Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982.

Shows how Mark has composed chapter 15 of his passion account in such fashion as to highlight a royal theology that comes to climactic expression in the centurion's confession of Jesus as the Son of God.

———. *What Are They Saying about Mark?* New York: Paulist Press,

1987. Surveys twenty-five years of Markan research, discussed in easily understood language. The book has been replaced in the series by another, more up-to-date volume by Daniel Harrington, but it remains valuable for its treatment of works in the mid-twentieth century dealing with four major topics: the setting in which Mark's Gospel arose, Mark's understanding of Jesus and of discipleship, principles Mark used in composing his Gospel, and present-day literary approaches to Mark's Gospel.

Meagher, John C. *Clumsy Construction in Mark's Gospel: A Critique*

of Form and Redaktionsgeschichte. TST 3. New York: Mellen,

1979. Proposes that Mark's Gospel is so awkwardly written and

ineptly edited that it is futile to look for overarching purpose in his redaction.

Miller, Susan. *Women in Mark's Gospel*. JSNTSup 259. London: T&T Clark, 2004.

Minor, Mitzi. *The Power of Mark's Story*. St. Louis: Chalice, 2001.

———. *The Spirituality of Mark*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996.

Myers, Ched. *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1989. Applies literary criticism, sociohistorical exegesis, and political hermeneutics to interpret the entire text of Mark's Gospel as a "manifesto of radical discipleship."

———. *Who Will Roll Away the Stone? Discipleship Queries for First-World Christians*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000.

Neiryneck, Frans. *Duality in Mark: Contributions to the Study of the Markan Redaction*. BETL 31. Louvain: Leuven University Press, 1972. A catalogue and description of "two-step expressions" in Mark, which the author takes to be one of the most characteristic features of Markan style.

Oyen, Geert van, and Tom Shepherd, eds. *The Trial and Death of Jesus: Essays on the Passion Narrative in Mark*. CBET 45. Leuven: Peeters, 2006.

Pallares, José Cárdenas. *A Poor Man Called Jesus: Reflections on the Gospel of Mark*. Translated by Robert R. Barr. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1986. Explores the liberating dimension of Jesus's

words and deeds, demonstrating how his identification of the poor and outcasts was seen as subversive by political and religious authorities.

Patella, Michael. *Lord of the Cosmos: Mithras, Paul, and the Gospel of Mark*. New York: T&T Clark International, 2006.

Patte, Daniel, and Aline Patte. *Structural Exegesis: From Theory to Practice; Exegesis of Mark 15 and 16, Hermeneutical Implications*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978. An attempt to apply the secular literary theory of “structuralism” to a theological interpretation of Mark’s passion account.

Peabody, David Barrett. *Mark as Composer*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1987. A detailed analysis of the Greek text of Mark’s Gospel with the intention of isolating redactional features that come from the hand of the evangelist.

Perrin, Norman. *A Modern Pilgrimage in New Testament Christology*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974. A collection of essays that focus on the Christology of Mark and especially on Mark’s use of “the Son of Man.”

Petersen, Norman R. *Literary Criticism for New Testament Critics*. GBS. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978. In chapter 3, the whole of Mark’s narrative is investigated to show that Mark locates his story’s resolution in the meeting that the young man in white, following Jesus’s own words, predicts Jesus will have with the disciples in Galilee. The reader is invited to project that, at this

meeting, the disciples come out from under their cloud of ignorance.

Räsänen, Heikki. *The "Messianic Secret" in Mark's Gospel*. SNTW.

London: T&T Clark, 1990.

Reiser, William. *Jesus in Solidarity with His People*. Collegeville, MN:

Liturgical Press, 2000.

Rhoads, David. *Reading Mark: Engaging the Gospel*. Minneapolis:

Fortress, 2004. A collection of essays.

Rhoads, David, with Joanna Dewey and Donald Michie. *Mark as*

Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel. 2nd ed.

Philadelphia: Fortress, 1999. Points the way, more than any other single work, to a literary (narrative-critical) study of Mark's Gospel. Following an English translation, it treats, in turn, the rhetoric, settings, plot, and characters of Mark's narrative.

Riley, Harold. *The Making of Mark: An Exploration*. Macon, GA:

Mercer University Press, 1989. Attempts to interpret Mark's Gospel as a redaction of Matthew and Luke, with particular attention to his style, personal vocabulary, and reasons for inclusion or exclusion of material.

Robbins, Vernon K. *Jesus the Teacher: A Socio-Rhetorical*

Interpretation of Mark. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984. A study of sociorhetorical criticism that understands Mark to have combined biblical-Jewish and Greco-Roman traditions and conventions. Mark's Jesus is at once biblical prophet and Greco-Roman philosopher and teacher; he fulfills Jewish

messianic expectations in a way that would capture the attention of non-Jews of Mediterranean society.

Robinson, James M. *The Problem of History in Mark and Other Markan Studies*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982. A collection of three studies by a leading New Testament scholar: a comparison of the *Gattung* (genre) of Mark and John; a study of potential gnostic influences on Mark; and an analysis of the eschatological struggle in Mark 1:1–13 and its presence elsewhere in the Gospel and early Christianity.

Roscam, Hendrika N. *The Purpose of the Gospel of Mark in Its Historical and Social Context*. NovTSup 114. Leiden: Brill, 2004.

Roth, Wolfgang. *Hebrew Gospel: Cracking the Code of Mark*. Yorktown Heights, NY: Meyer-Stone Books, 1988. Examines the genre and function of Mark's Gospel in light of ancient and modern Jewish literature. States that this Gospel is an example of Jewish storytelling that reflects an intra-Jewish conversation concerning Jesus.

Sabin, Marie Noonan. *Reopening the Word: Reading Mark as Theology in the Context of Early Judaism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Samuel, Simon. *A Postcolonial Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*. LNTS 340. London: T&T Clark, 2007.

Santos, Narry. *Slave of All: The Paradox of Authority and Servanthood in the Gospel of Mark*. JSNTSup 237. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000.

Schenke, Ludger. *Glory and the Way of the Cross: The Gospel of Mark*. Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1982. Expounds the classic theory that Mark's Gospel was written to combat a false "theology of glory" within his community.

Senior, Donald. *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark*.

Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1984. Offers a detailed but eminently readable analysis of the passion account of Mark.

Analysis is preceded by a chapter on the material leading up to the passion account and is followed by a chapter emphasizing the theology of the account.

Shiner, Whitney. *Proclaiming the Gospel: First-Century Performance of Mark*. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2003.

Stock, Augustine. *Call to Discipleship: A Literary Study of Mark's Gospel*. GNS 1. Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1982. A study of Mark's Gospel as a dramatic work bearing traces of contemporary Greek drama. Shows how Mark uses standard literary techniques to reach his reader with certain points related to discipleship.

Such, W. A. *The Abomination of Desolation in the Gospel of Mark: Its Historical Reference in Mark 13:14 and Its Impact in the Gospel*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1998.

Sweetland, Dennis. *Our Journey with Jesus: Discipleship according to Mark*. GNS 22. Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1987.

Begins with a study of discipleship in Mark's Gospel and leads into a discussion of Christian discipleship today. Highlighted

themes: the life of Christian community and the relationship of discipleship to Christology.

Telford, William. *The Barren Temple and the Withered Tree: A Redaction-Critical Analysis of the Cursing of the Fig-Tree Pericope in Mark's Gospel and Its Relation to the Cleansing of the Temple Tradition*. JSNTSup 1. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980.

A detailed exegetical study of Mark 11, including comparison of themes found here that are also in the Old Testament, in rabbinic literature, and in other New Testament books.

———, ed. *The Interpretation of Mark*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985.

Eight essays by scholars who have contributed to what the editor terms a “literary explosion” in the area of Markan studies. Any such collection necessarily gives an incomplete picture, but the essays included here add insights into Mark’s Gospel. The introductory essay contains a good review of issues currently debated by scholars.

Thompson, Mary R. *The Role of Disbelief in Mark: A New Approach to the Second Gospel*. New York: Paulist Press, 1989.

Examines the negative realities, failures, and misunderstandings portrayed in Mark’s Gospel to explicate the evangelist’s theology as a realistic one in which faith and disbelief coexist.

Tolbert, Mary Ann. *Sowing the Gospel: Mark's World in Literary-Historical Perspective*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989. Takes the parable of the sower as the key to understanding Mark’s Gospel

as persuasive literature proclaiming the gospel within a particular social-historical setting.

Tuckett, Christopher, ed. *The Messianic Secret*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983. A collection of several now classic studies on this important theme in Markan research.

Upton, Bridget Gilfillan. *Hearing Mark's Endings: Listening to Ancient Popular Texts through Speech Act Theory*. BIS 79. Leiden: Brill, 2006. A study in orality, focusing on the audience impact of Mark 16:18, Mark 16:9–20, and the “shorter ending” of Mark 16:9.

Via, Dan O., Jr. *The Ethics of Mark's Gospel in the Middle of Time*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985. Immediate purpose: exploring the ethical teachings of Mark's Gospel, especially chapter 10 within the context of the Markan narrative itself. The larger purpose: setting forth the implications the narrative holds for faith and conduct in today's world.

Vines, Michael. *The Problem of Markan Genre: The Gospel of Mark and the Jewish Novel*. AcBib 3. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002.

Waetjen, Herman. *A Reordering of Power: A Sociopolitical Reading of Mark's Gospel*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989. An interpretation of Mark from the perspective of liberation theology that identifies Jesus as announcing new power structures in defiance of political domination by a ruling elite.

Waterman, Mark W. *The Empty Tomb Tradition of Mark: Text, History, and Theological Struggles*. Los Angeles: Agathos, 2006.

Weeden, Theodore. *Mark: Traditions in Conflict*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971. A classic study that proposes the evangelist portrays the disciples negatively because they represent a segment of Christianity distinct from that of his community.

Williams, James G. *Gospel against Parable: Mark's Language of Mystery*. BLS 12. Sheffield: Almond, 1985. Book's contention is that Mark is a narrative gospel, the product of bringing together "biography" and "parable." It sets forth the mystery of the kingdom as revealed in "the way" of Jesus, the suffering Son of Man.

Wrede, William. *The Messianic Secret*. Translated by J. C. G. Greig. 1901. Reprint, London: James Clarke, 1971. Presents the thesis that Mark utilizes a secrecy motif in his Gospel in order to reconcile his messianic portrayal of Jesus with the nonmessianic nature of Jesus's actual life and ministry; a classic study.

7.7

Distinctive Characteristics of Mark's Gospel

A. Mark's Gospel is sparse and brief compared to the others.

- no genealogy or stories about Jesus's birth
- no Beatitudes, Lord's Prayer, or Golden Rule
- no resurrection appearances

B. Mark's Gospel ends abruptly.

- "So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid" (16:8).

C. The linguistic style of Mark's Gospel tends to be unrefined.

- Verbs in the "historical present" (present-tense used for past action) are used often.
- Pronouns frequently lack clear antecedents.

D. Mark's Gospel displays a special knack for the art of storytelling.

- Narrative anticipations that "glue" independent stories together:
 - "have a boat ready" (3:9) (to prepare for 4:1)
- Two-step progressions:
 - "That evening, at sunset" (1:32)

- Intercalation (“sandwich” stories):

disciples mission/death of John the Baptist (6:7–30)

cursing the fig tree/expulsion of money changers (11:12–20)

E. Mark emphasizes Jesus’s deeds over his words (as compared to the other Gospels).

- Miracle stories take up a greater part of the total book and are told in greater detail.
- Jesus’s teaching takes up a lesser part of the total book and is told in less detail.

F. Mark’s story is dominated by Jesus’s passion.

- plot to kill Jesus formed already in 3:6 (cf. with Matt. 12:14; Luke 19:47)
- three predictions of the passion (8:31; 9:31; 10:33–34)

G. Mark’s Gospel is marked by a sense of eschatological urgency.

- “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near” (1:15).
- “This generation will not pass away until all these things take place” (13:30; cf. 9:1).
- Note also the “historical presents” and the repeated use of “immediately” throughout the narrative.

H. Mark seems to have a special interest in Galilee.

- The first half of this Gospel is devoted to Jesus's ministry in Galilee.
- Jesus predicts a postresurrection reunion with his disciples in Galilee (14:28; 16:7).

(Cf. this to Luke's emphasis on Jerusalem.)

I. Mark frequently explains Jewish matters, but not Roman ones.

- Compare 7:3–4, where Jewish custom of purification is explained, with 10:12, where knowledge of Roman divorce law is assumed.
- Defines Aramaic words: *Boanerges* (3:17), *talitha cum* (5:41), *corban* (7:11), *ephphatha* (7:34), *Bartimaeus* (10:46), *Abba* (14:36), *Golgotha* (15:22), *Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani* (15:34).
- Does not define Latin words: *legion* (5:9, 15), *denarius* (12:15), *praetorium* (15:16), *centurion* (15:39).

J. Mark assumes his readers already have a basic knowledge of Christian tradition.

- He assumes that they know what he means by the term "gospel" (1:1, 14–15; 10:29; 13:10; 14:9).

- He assumes that they regard the Scriptures of Israel as the word of God (7:8).
- He assumes that they will understand what it means to say that Jesus is the Messiah (8:29) and that he gives his life as a ransom (10:45).
- He expects them to recognize otherwise unidentified characters such as John the Baptist (1:4) and Simon and Andrew (1:16).

K. Mark's Gospel is imbued with a motif of secrecy.

- Jesus's own disciples do not understand who he is (4:41; 6:51–52).
- Jesus commands others to keep his identity or miraculous deeds a secret (1:23–25, 43–44; 3:11–12; 5:43; 7:36; 8:30; 9:9).
- Jesus speaks in parables so that people won't understand what he says (4:10–12).

L. Mark's Gospel offers the most human portrait of Jesus.

- Jesus becomes hungry (11:12) and tired (6:31).
- He exhibits a full range of human emotions, including pity (1:41), anger (3:5), sadness (3:5), wonder (6:6), compassion (6:34), indignation (10:14), love (10:21), and anguish (14:34).

- Jesus does not know everything (13:32), and his power is limited (6:5).

M. Mark highlights the failures of Jesus's disciples.

- unperceptive (4:41; 6:51–52; 8:14–21)
- self-interest (8:32; 9:32–34; 10:35–41)
- betray, deny, and forsake Jesus (14:10–11, 17–21, 26–31, 37–38, 44–45, 50, 66–72)
- Mark's Gospel ends without recording any redress of the disciples' faithlessness, such as the remorse of Judas (Matt. 27:3–10), the recovery of Peter (John 21:15–19), or the postresurrection reconciliation of the eleven with Jesus (Matt. 28:18–20; Luke 24:36–53; John 20:19–21:14).

7.8

Three Prominent Rhetorical Devices in Mark's Gospel

Two-Step Progression

Purpose: guides the reader to take a second look, which clarifies and emphasizes (cf. 8:22–26).

“Jesus the Christ, the Son of God” (1:1).

“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near”
(1:15).

“The leprosy left him, and he was made clean” (1:42).

“What is this? A new teaching—with authority!” (1:27).

“Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?” (4:40).

“Do not fear, only believe.” (5:36).

“Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial” (14:38).

Threefold Patterns

Purpose: creates suspense for the reader, who comes to anticipate a buildup to a dramatic climax.

There are three episodes of conflict in a boat (4:35–41; 6:45–52; 8:14–21).

There are three bread stories (6:35–44; 8:1–10, 14–21).

Jesus predicts his death three times (8:31; 9:31; 10:33–34).

Jesus enters the temple three times (11:11, 15, 27).

Disciples fall asleep three times (14:37, 40, 41).

Peter denies Jesus three times (14:66–72).

Pilate asks three questions (15:9, 12, 14).

Crucifixion narrated in three three-hour intervals (15:25, 33, 34).

Framing

Purpose: creates suspense and adds commentary (the related stories interpret and illuminate each other).

Jairus's daughter and the woman with the hemorrhage (5:21–43).

Mission of disciples and death of John the Baptist (6:7–30).

Cursing of fig tree and cleansing of temple (11:12–20).

Jesus's confession and Peter's denial (14:15–15:5).

7.9

Intercalation in the Gospel of Mark (Box 7.5)

Jesus's family sets out to seize him (3:21).

Religious leaders accuse Jesus of using the power of Beelzebul

(3:22–30).

Jesus's family arrives and is rebuffed by him (3:31–35).

Jesus goes to heal the daughter of Jairus, a synagogue ruler

(5:22–24).

A woman with hemorrhages is healed by touching Jesus's garment

(5:25–34).

Jesus raises the daughter of Jairus from the dead (5:35–43).

Jesus sends his disciples out on a mission (6:7–13).

Mark gives an account of how Herod killed John the Baptist (6:14–

29).

The disciples return with a report of their mission (6:30).

Jesus curses a fig tree for not bearing fruit (11:12–14).

Jesus attacks the temple, calling it a “den of robbers” (11:15–19).

The fig tree that Jesus cursed has withered and died (11:20–21).

7.10

The Way of the Cross (Box 7.6)

Jesus heals blindness (Mark 8:22–26).			
Jesus predicts his passion.	8:31	9:30–31	10:32–34
The disciples misunderstand.	8:32–33	9:32–34	10:35–40
Jesus teaches the way of the cross.	8:34–38	9:35–37	10:41–45
Jesus heals blindness (Mark 10:46–52).			

7.11

The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark

Theme: Jesus Dies as One Abandoned

Peter, James, and John fall asleep while he prays in the garden (14:32–42).

Judas betrays him (14:43–45).

Disciples forsake him and run away (14:50).

A young man leaves his clothes to get away (14:51–52; cf. 1:18, 20).

Peter denies Jesus (14:66–72).

Jewish leaders mock him as a false prophet (14:65).

The crowd calls for him to be crucified (15:6–14).

Roman soldiers mock him as a false king (15:16–20).

Passers-by join Jewish leaders in mocking him on the cross (15:29–32).

Crucified criminals taunt him (15:32b).

Darkness covers the land, and Jesus cries out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (15:33–34).

Theme: Jesus Gives His Life as a Ransom

Jesus knows of his passion in advance and says that it must take place (8:31; 9:31; 10:33–34).

Jesus accepts his passion as the will of God (14:36).

Jesus describes his passion as giving “his life a ransom for many”

(10:45) (in Greek, *lytron* = payment to free a slave, or a substitute sacrifice).

Theme: Jesus’s Death Reveals Him as the Son of God

Jesus is declared to be the Son of God from the outset (1:1).

Humans do not recognize or confess him as the Son of God (1:27; 2:7; 4:41; 6:2–3; cf. 1:11, 24; 3:11; 5:7; 9:7).

Jesus is sentenced to die because he claims to be the Son of God (14:61–62; 15:29–32).

Ironically, his death inspires the first recognition of him as the Son of God (15:39).

Theme: Jesus’s Death Is Linked to His Baptism

Events at his death recall events at his baptism: ripping of the heavens and of the temple curtain (1:10; 15:38) and identification as the Son of God (1:11; 15:39).

Jesus refers to his death as his baptism (10:38–39).

7.12

When Will Jesus Return?

Mark 13 makes three points with regard to the time of Jesus's second coming.

The Time of Jesus's Coming Is Not Yet

"Beware that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name and say, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray. When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs." (13:5–8 [see also 13:21–22])

The Time of Jesus's Coming Is Soon

"From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. (13:28–30)

The Time of Jesus's Coming Is Unknown

"But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert, for you do not know when the time will come." (13:32–33)

Summary

At the time Mark wrote his Gospel, the most prominent leaders of the Christian church had been murdered in horrifying spectacles, and the holy city of Jerusalem was on the verge of being decimated by pagan armies (if, indeed, it had not already suffered that fate). It probably seemed to Mark and his readers that the end was at hand (13:28–30; cf. 9:1). Nevertheless, Mark records words of Jesus that caution readers against fanaticism: the end perhaps is not yet (13:5–8, 21–22), and in any case it cannot be predicted with certainty (13:32–33). In general, Mark wants to encourage readers to live always on the edge, expecting the end to come very soon but realizing that it might not come as speedily as they hope.

7.13

The Twelve Disciples

All four Gospels indicate that Jesus had twelve disciples who had a privileged status among his many followers. Their names are given in three of the Gospels and in Acts, as indicated in this chart:

New Testament Lists of the Twelve Disciples

Matthew 10:2–4	Mark 3:16–19	Luke 6:13–16	Acts 1:13–14
Simon Peter	Simon Peter	Simon Peter	Peter
Andrew	James of Zebedee	Andrew	John
James of Zebedee	John of Zebedee	James	James
John of Zebedee	Andrew	John	Andrew
Philip	Philip	Philip	Philip
Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Thomas
Thomas	Matthew	Matthew	Bartholomew
Matthew	Thomas	Thomas	Matthew
James of Alphaeus	James of Alphaeus	James of Alphaeus	James of Alphaeus
Thaddaeus	Thaddaeus	Simon the Zealot	Simon the Zealot
Simon the Cananean	Simon the Cananean	Judas of James	Judas of James
Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot	(Judas Iscariot)
			(Matthias, cf. 1:26)

Eleven names appear on all four lists, but whereas Matthew and Mark list a disciple named Thaddaeus who is not found on the lists in Luke or Acts, the latter two books list a disciple named “Judas of James” (which could mean “son of James” or “brother of James”) who is not mentioned in Matthew or Mark.

Church tradition resolved this discrepancy by declaring Thaddaeus and Judas to be the same person, offering the not unreasonable

suggestion that this disciple went by the name Thaddaeus to avoid confusion with another disciple named Judas who was among the twelve. Modern scholars allow that this could have been the case but also note the possibility that changes in the personnel of the twelve might have been made at different times (so Thaddaeus could have among the twelve at one point and Judas of James at another point).

Interpreters also note the slight difference in the order in which the disciples are named, though there is a high degree of consistency in the various orderings. Notably, Peter is always listed first, and Judas Iscariot is always listed last.

The matter is complicated somewhat through consideration of John's Gospel, which mentions "the twelve" (6:67, 70–71; 20:24) but never provides a list. If one scours the entire book, the names of some of the twelve familiar from the Synoptics do appear: Andrew (1:40); Peter (1:42), Philip (1:44), Judas Iscariot (6:71), another Judas (14:22), Thomas (20:24–25), and "the sons of Zebedee" (21:2). But this would account for only eight of the twelve. John's Gospel does not mention Bartholomew, Matthew, James of Alphaeus, or Simon the Zealot. And it seems to speak of someone named Nathanael as though he is among the twelve (1:45–49; 21:2).

At some point in church history, ecclesiastic authorities sought to resolve the confusion by simply declaring (without any evidence) that Nathanael is the same person identified as Bartholomew in the other Gospels. That has seemed satisfactory to many Bible readers,

especially since would otherwise be known of Bartholomew and there would be no biblical stories of his exploits to read on August 24, the day assigned to him in the liturgical church year. Scholars are a harder sell and tend to regard the Bartholomew = Nathanael equation as a somewhat facetious attempt at harmonization. Maybe Nathanael was simply a friend of the disciples or, again, maybe the precise membership of “the twelve” changed over time.

Whatever the exact names of these disciples might have been, all four Gospels hold that the concept of “the twelve” is significant. This is no doubt because the number recalls the twelve tribes of Israel and so Jesus’s designation of a group of followers as “the twelve” was probably intended to symbolize the restoration of Israel that he hoped to effect. Indeed, Jesus is portrayed as promising his disciples that they will judge the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:30).

The significance of the number twelve is also evident in the story reported in Acts 1:15–26, where the early church feels a need to replace Judas Iscariot by selecting Matthias to fill out their number. This process does not continue, however: when James the son of Zebedee is killed (Acts 12:2), no effort is made to replace him. The apostle Paul knew about “the twelve” and, at least two decades before the Gospels were written, he referred to that entity as a group that could authenticate the church’s proclamation of Jesus’s resurrection (1 Cor. 15:5).

7.14

The Disciples of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark

The Gospel of Mark develops two themes regarding the disciples of Jesus:

1. Jesus's disciples are faithless to him.
2. Jesus is faithful to his disciples.

Theme One: The Disciples' Faithlessness to Jesus

The disciples' faithlessness is developed progressively in three stages:

First, the Disciples Are Unperceptive

The disciples do not grasp who Jesus is. They hear his word and witness his mighty acts, but they do not realize that he is the authoritative agent of God, nor do they understand much of what he says to them. This is illustrated in three successive boat scenes:

After Jesus stills a storm at sea, he asks them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" They huddle with fear, asking each other, "Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?" (4:35–41).

After feeding the five thousand, Jesus comes to his disciples, walking on the water, and he stills another storm. Mark says that "they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened" (6:45–52).

When the disciples worry about not having enough bread, Jesus reminds them of the miraculous feedings that he has performed and asks, “Do you still not perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes, and fail to see? Do you have ears, and fail to hear?” (8:14–21).

Second, the Disciples Misunderstand

At about the midpoint of this Gospel, the disciples come to a better understanding of who Jesus is, but they draw all the wrong conclusions from this. They realize that he is the authoritative agent of God, but they think that this means glory and honor for him (and for themselves). The best examples are their reactions to his three passion predictions:

After Jesus predicts his passion the first time, Peter (who now realizes that Jesus is the Christ [see 8:29]) rebukes him, prompting Jesus to say, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things” (8:31–33).

When Jesus predicts his passion a second time, the disciples remain completely oblivious to what he has said and go on to discuss which of them is the greatest. Jesus responds by saying, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all” (9:33–35).

Immediately after Jesus predicts his passion a third time, two of his disciples ask him if they can be guaranteed seats at his right and his left in his glory (10:35–41).

Third, the Disciples Reject Jesus

When the disciples do come to understand the nature of Jesus's mission, they betray, deny, and forsake him.

One of the disciples, Judas, betrays Jesus, just as Jesus predicted (14:10–11, 17–21, 44–45).

Another disciple, Peter, denies Jesus, just as Jesus predicted (14:29–31, 66–72).

All the other disciples forsake Jesus, just as he predicted (14:26–28, 50).

The faithlessness of Jesus's disciples in Mark's passion narrative is the final stage of what has been developing all along. In some sense, the disciples appear to get worse, not better, as the story progresses. Significantly, this faithlessness is reported without redress. Mark does not report the remorse of Judas (Matt. 27:3–10), the recovery of Peter (John 21:15–19), or the postresurrection reconciliation of Jesus with his disciples (Matt. 28:18–20; Luke 24:36–53; John 20:19–21:14).¹

Theme Two: Jesus's Faithfulness to His Disciples

Jesus's faithfulness to his disciples is demonstrated throughout the Gospel of Mark in five ways.

Jesus Calls the Disciples (1:16–20; 2:13–14; 3:13–14)

There are no “volunteer disciples” in Mark's Gospel. People become disciples at Jesus's initiative, as a result of his call.

Jesus Gathers the Disciples into a “Family” (3:34–35)

Jesus describes his disciples (and all who do the will of God) as his brothers and sisters and mother. The identity of the disciples as a group and their relationship to one another is based solely on their relationship to Jesus.

Jesus Teaches the Disciples, Enlightening Them with Privileged Knowledge (4:33–34)

Jesus teaches his disciples about the mystery of the kingdom (4:11) and sometimes provides them with private explanations of his sayings (4:10–20; 7:17–23). Significantly, he responds to their misconceptions that follow each of his passion predictions with teachings on the true meaning of discipleship (8:34–38; 9:35–37; 10:42–45).

Jesus Empowers the Disciples for Mission (3:14–15; 6:7–13)

Jesus provides his disciples with the authority that they need to preach, to heal, and to overcome Satan by casting out demons.

Jesus Keeps His Disciples in Spite of Their Faithlessness (14:26–27; 16:7)

Jesus tells his disciples that even though they will forsake him, he will want them to rejoin him after his resurrection. Significantly, Mark

does not say whether the disciples accept this invitation. As the story closes, the fate of the disciples is unknown.

The Intended Effect on Mark's Reader

Mark seems to assume that his readers will identify with the disciples (see, e.g., 13:14, where he assumes that readers will hear words spoken to the disciples as being spoken to them). Thus the unresolved issue that confronts the disciples at the end of Mark's Gospel thrusts itself beyond the world of the story into the world of Mark's readers. Those readers, like the disciples, must weigh their own faithlessness to Jesus against his faithfulness to them and evaluate their relationship with him accordingly.

1. On the disciples' progressive faithlessness, see Theodore Weeden, *Mark: Traditions in Conflict* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971).

7.15

The Crucifixion of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark

A Mode of Execution

Pilate hands Jesus over to be crucified by Roman soldiers (15:15) after Jewish leaders convict him of blasphemy (14:61–65) and stir up the crowd against him (15:11). The execution is portrayed as sadistic, accompanied by brutality and mockery.

A Means of Redemption

Mark 8:31

“The Son of Man must undergo great suffering.” There is an element of divine necessity in Jesus’s suffering. The crucifixion is his appointed “cup,” which God wills him to drink (cf. 10:38; 14:23–24, 36; 15:36).

Mark 10:45

“The Son of Man came . . . to give his life a ransom for many.” This seems to point to what theologians later called a doctrine of vicarious or substitutionary atonement.

Mark 14:22–25

“This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.”

The symbolism of the Eucharist presents Jesus’s death as a sacrifice that pays for human sin.

A Model of Discipleship

Mark 8:34

“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” The “way of the cross” becomes the governing expectation for Christian discipleship. This involves devotion to serving others (cf. 10:41–43) and a willingness to suffer for the sake of others.

7.16

Papias on the Gospel of Mark (Box 7.1)

Papias, a second-century Christian, reports the tradition that he heard regarding the Gospel of Mark:

The elder also used to say: “Mark, who had been Peter’s interpreter, wrote down carefully, but not in order, all that he remembered of the Lord’s sayings and doings. For he had not heard the Lord or been one of his followers, but later, as I said, one of Peter’s. Peter used to adapt his teaching to the occasion, without making a systematic arrangement of the Lord’s sayings, so that Mark was quite justified in writing down some things just as he remembered them. For he had one purpose only—to leave out nothing that he had heard, and to make no misstatement about it.”

Eusebius, *History of the Church*, trans. G. A. Williamson (London: Penguin, 1965),

§3.39.15.

7.17

John Mark in the Early Church (Box 7.2)

The author of the Gospel of Mark has been identified popularly and traditionally with a Christian known as John Mark, who is mentioned in the book of Acts (12:12, 25; 13:5, 13; 15:37–39). What do we know about this person?

- John Mark was a young Christian who lived in Jerusalem, where his mother hosted meetings of the early church. He would have had opportunity as a child to meet Peter and all the rest of Jesus’s disciples, in addition to Jesus’s mother and brothers.
- John Mark was a relative of Barnabas, and he accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey. The rigors of the trip, however, proved to be too much for him, and he returned home. Paul refused to let Mark go on the next trip, but Barnabas took him on a separate missionary venture.
- Mark, the cousin of Barnabas, is later mentioned as being with Paul when the latter was in prison (Col. 4:10; cf. Philem. 24; 2 Tim. 4:11). This suggests that John Mark and Paul had reconciled.
- It is not clear whether John Mark is the same “Mark” mentioned as being with Peter in Rome in 1 Peter 5:13.

7.18

Emotions of Jesus

The Gospel of Mark often attributes emotions to Jesus in ways that are sometimes omitted or muted in the other Gospels.

Mark 1:41	“moved with pity”	No emotion mentioned in Matthew 8:2–4 or Luke 5:12–16.
Mark 3:5	“he looked around at them with anger”	No emotion mentioned in Matthew 12:9–14 or Luke 6:6–11.
Mark 3:5	“he was grieved at their hardness of heart”	No emotion mentioned in Matthew 12:9–14 or Luke 6:6–11.
Mark 6:6	“he was amazed at their unbelief”	No emotion mentioned in Matthew 13:35–58 or Luke 4:16–30.
Mark 6:34	“he had compassion for them”	Same phrase in Matthew 14:14, but no emotion mentioned in Luke 9:12–14
Mark 10:14	“he was indignant”	No emotion mentioned in Matthew 19:13–15 or Luke 18:15–17.
Mark 10:21	“Jesus, looking at him, loved him”	No emotion mentioned in Matthew 19:16–30 or Luke 18:18–30.
Mark 14:34	“I am deeply grieved, even to death”	Same phrase in Matthew 26:28, but no emotion mentioned in Luke 22:39–45

The usual explanation is that Matthew and Luke may have feared that attributing emotions to Jesus would lessen his divinity, while the author of Mark’s Gospel either did not consider this a problem or wanted to present a more human portrait of Jesus.

Augustine (296–373) offers these comments on Jesus’s emotions—
focusing especially on anger:

If angry emotions which spring from a love of what is good and from holy charity are to be labeled vices, then all I can say is that some vices should be called virtues. When such affections as anger are directed to their proper objects, they are following good reasoning, and no one should dare to describe them as maladies or vicious passions. This explains why the Lord himself, who humbled himself to the form of a servant, was guilty of no sin whatever as he displayed these emotions openly when appropriate. Surely the One who assumed a true human body and soul would not counterfeit his human affections. Certainly, the Gospel does not falsely attribute emotions to Christ when it speaks of him being saddened and angered by the lawyers because of their blindness of heart. (*City of God*, Book 14)

R. J. Deferrari, ed., *Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, 86 vols. (Washington DC: Catholic University of America, 1947–present), 14:368–69.

7.19

Mark 1:4—Purpose of John’s Baptism (Church Tradition)

The Gospels of Mark and Luke both say that John the Baptist proclaimed a “baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” Notably, the author of Matthew’s Gospel rewords this, to indicate only that people confessed their sins when John baptized them.

Mark 1:4	Luke 3:2–3	Matthew 3:1, 5–6
“John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”	“The word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”	“In those days John the Baptizer appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, ‘Repent for the kingdom of heaven has come near’ . . . Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.”

Perhaps the author of Matthew was uncomfortable with attributing to John’s baptism something that he believed only Christian baptism as authorized by Jesus could accomplish.

All three Synoptic Gospels also indicate that he baptizes people with water while the one who is coming after him will baptize people with the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:8) or, indeed, with the Holy Spirit and fire (Matt. 3:11; Luke 3:16).

One story in the book of Acts also attempts to distinguish between the effects of these different baptisms:

Paul passed through the interior regions and came to Ephesus, where he found some disciples. He said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?” They replied, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” Then he said, “Into what then were you baptized?” They answered, “Into John’s baptism.” Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus.” (Acts 19:1–4)

Some writers in the first few centuries of church history also tried to sort this matter out. Here are the views of two prominent leaders in the Eastern Church, both of whom served (successively) as Archbishop of Constantinople.

Gregory Nazianzen (ca. 329–390):

Let us here treat briefly of the different kinds of baptism.

Moses baptized, but in water, in the cloud and in the sea; but this he did figuratively. [see 1 Cor. 10:1–2]

John also baptized, not indeed in the rite of the Jews, not solely in water, but also for the remission of sins; yet not in an entirely spiritual manner, for he had not added: “in the spirit.”

Jesus baptized, but in the Spirit; and this is perfection.

There is also a fourth baptism, which is wrought by martyrdom and blood, in which Christ himself was also baptized, which is far

more venerable than the others, in as much as it is not soiled by repeated contagion. [see Mark 10:38–39; Luke 12:50]

There is yet a fifth, but more laborious, by tears; with which David each night bedewed his bed, washing his couch with tears [see Ps. 6:6].

*Oration 39*¹

John Chrysostom (ca. 349–407):

Since the Victim [Jesus] had not been offered, nor had the Holy Spirit yet descended, of what kind was this remission of sins? . . . When he said that he came “preaching the baptism of repentance,” he adds, “for the remission of sins”; as if to say: he persuaded them to repent of their sins, so that later they might more easily receive pardon through believing in Christ. For unless brought to it by repentance, they would not seek for pardon. His baptism therefore served no other end than as a preparation for belief in Christ.

The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 10.²

1. M. F. Toal, trans. and ed., *The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers: A Manual of Preaching, Spiritual Reading, and Meditation*, 4 vols. (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1958) 1:74–75.

2. Toal, *The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers*, 1:74–75.

7.20

Mark 1:6—John’s Clothing and Diet (Church Tradition)

The Gospels of Matthew and Mark describe John the Baptist as having what might be regarded as a peculiar wardrobe and diet:

Matthew 3:4	Mark 1:6
“Now John wore clothing of camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey.”	“Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.”

Modern Scholarship

Modern scholars usually account for John’s clothing and diet in one (or both) of two ways:¹

Historical scholars ask why John would have dressed and eaten in such a manner, and the explanation is usually that by so doing he could live an austere life dependent on no one but God. He dressed himself in what could be found in the desert (loose camel hair woven together and fastened with a strip of animal skin) and he ate what he could find there (either literal locusts or, possibly, a type of bean pod that was popularly called a “locust”).

Redaction critics ask why Matthew and Mark wanted to tell their readers these details; the answer is usually that they wanted to liken John to Elijah, who is described in a similar manner in 2 Kings 1:8 (cf. Matt. 17:9–13; Mark 9:9–13).

Early Church Tradition

Some writers in the first few centuries of church history offer comments.

Jerome (ca. 347–420):

John the Baptist had a religious mother and his father was a priest. Yet neither his mother's affection nor his father's affluence could induce him to live in his parents' house at the risk of the world's temptations. So he lived in the desert. Seeking Christ with his eyes, he refused to look at anything else. His rough garb, his girdle made of skins, his diet of locusts and wild honey were all alike designed to encourage virtue and continence.

(Letter 125.7)²

John Chrysostom (ca. 349–407):

You may ask, why did he wear a leather girdle? . . . Elijah also was so clothed, and likewise many others among holy men, either because they were engaged in heavy labor, or were upon a journey, or in any other necessity that involved labor, and because they despised ornament, and followed an austere way of life.

It was necessary that the precursor of the One who was to undo the age-long burdens of men, such as toil, malediction, pain and sweat, should in his own person give some token of the gifts to come, so as to stand above these tribulations. And so it was that he neither tilled the earth, nor plowed the furrow, nor did he eat bread of his own sweat, for his table was easily prepared, and

his clothing more easily than his table, and his dwelling more easily than his clothing. For he had need neither of roof, nor bed, nor table, nor any such thing. But even while still within this flesh of ours he lived an almost angelic life. His clothing was put together from the hair of camels, so that even from his garments he might teach us that we free ourselves of human needs, and need not be bound to this earth, but that we may return to the pristine dignity in which Adam first lived, before he had need of garments or of clothing. (*The Gospel of Matthew*, Homily 10)³

Cyril of Jerusalem (313–386):

He fed on locusts to make his soul grow wings. Sated with honey, the words he spoke were sweeter than honey and of more profit. Clothed in a garment of camel's hair, he exemplified in his own person the holy life. (*The Catechetical Lectures* 3.6)⁴

1. See Joan E. Taylor, *The Immerser: John the Baptist within Second Temple Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).
2. P. Schaaf et al, eds., *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 2nd series, 14 vols. (New York: Christian Literature, 1887–94), 6:246.
3. P. Schaaf et al, eds., *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 1st series, 14 vols. (New York: Christian Literature, 1887–94), 10:63.
4. J. Ballie et al., eds., *Library of Christian Classics*, 26 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953–66), 4:93–94.

7.21

Mark 1:10—Why a Dove? (Church Tradition)

The Synoptic Gospels all report that the Spirit of God descended on Jesus like a dove at his baptism.

Matthew 3:16	Mark 1:10	Luke 3:21–22
“And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him.”	“And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him.”	“Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove.”

Many writers in the early church would wonder about the significance of the dove. Perhaps it is because doves are symbols of innocence (cf. Matt. 10:16) or purity or peace, or maybe it has something to do with Noah, who was brought an olive branch by a dove to let him know the flood was over (Gen. 8:8–11). But Ambrose wanted to make clear that it wasn't a *real* dove (see below)!

Gregory Thaumaturgus (213–270):

God opened the gates of the heavens and sent down the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, lighting upon the head of Jesus, pointing him out right there as the new Noah, even the maker of Noah, and the good pilot of the nature [that is, of humanity] which is in shipwreck. (*The Fourth Homily, On the Holy Theophany, or Christ's Baptism*)¹

Origen (185–ca. 254):

A dove—a tame, innocent and simple bird. Hence we are taught to copy the innocence of doves.

Tertullian (ca. 160–ca. 220):

The Holy Spirit came in the form of a dove in order that the nature of the Holy Spirit might be made plain by means of a creature of utter simplicity and innocence. For the dove's body has no gall in it. So after the deluge, by which the iniquity of the old world was purged away, after, so to speak, the baptism of the world, the dove as herald proclaimed to the earth the tempering of the wrath of heaven—sent forth from the ark and returning with an olive branch, which is a sigh of peace among the nations.

(*On Baptism* 8)²

John Chrysostom (ca. 349–407):

But why in the form of a dove? The dove is a gentle and pure creature. Since then the Spirit, too, is “a Spirit of gentleness,” he appears in the form of a dove, reminding us of Noah, to whom, when once a common disaster had overtaken the whole world and humanity was in danger of perishing, the dove appeared as a sign of deliverance from the tempest, and bearing an olive branch, published the good tidings of a serene presence over the whole world. All these things were given as a type of things to come. . . . In this case the dove also appeared, not bearing an olive branch, but pointing to our Deliverer from all evils, bringing hope filled with grace. For this dove does not simply lead one

family out of an ark, but the whole world toward heaven at her appearing. And instead of a branch of peace from an olive tree, she conveys the possibility of adoption for all the world's offspring in common. (*The Gospel of Matthew* 12.3)³

The Venerable Bede (672–735):

The image of a dove is placed before us by God so that we may learn the simplicity favored by him. So let us meditate on the nature of the dove, that from each one of its features of innocence we may learn the principles of a more becoming life. The dove is a stranger to malice. So may all bitterness, anger and indignation be taken away from us, together with all malice. The dove injures nothing with its mouth or talons, nor does it nourish itself or its young on tiny mice or grubs, as do almost all smaller birds. Let us see that our teeth are not weapons and arrows.⁴

Ambrose (347–397):

The Holy Spirit descended as a dove. Not “a dove descended,” but “as a dove.” (*The Sacraments* 1.6)

1. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*. 10 vols. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1885–96), 6:70–71.
2. H. D. Smith, ed., *Ante-Nicene Exegesis of the Gospels*. 6 vols. (London: SPCK, 1925), 1:304.
3. P. Schaaf et al., eds., *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 2nd series, 14 vols. (New York: Christian Literature, 1887–94), 10:77.

4. The Venerable Bede, *Homilies on the Gospels*, trans. L. T. Martin and D. Hurst
(Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1990) 1.12.

7.22

Mark 1:11—Quoting God: Why the Gospels Differ

One of the only times that God speaks directly in the New Testament may be found in the stories of Jesus’s baptism. But what God says in Matthew differs slightly from what God says in the other two Gospels.

Matthew 3:17	Mark 1:11	Luke 3:22
And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”	And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”	And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

Though the English is the same in both Mark and Luke in the NRSV, the Greek uses different prepositions: a more literal translation might read “with you” in Mark and “in you” in Luke.

The more significant difference, however, is that in Matthew, God speaks about Jesus in the third person, apparently informing John and others gathered as to the identity of the one who had just been baptized. In Mark and in Luke, God speaks to Jesus in the second person, informing him of his identity—or confirming that identity.

Scholars have tried to interpret these modes of divine revelation (*about* Jesus or *to* Jesus) in light of the Gospels’ christological understandings.

Augustine (354–430)

The Bishop of Hippo rightly discerned that Bible readers might be troubled by this apparent discrepancy. One would think that, if ever there were a time for precision, it would be in citing the words of God spoken directly from heaven. But the bishop assured readers that such precision is unnecessary because the verses all mean the same thing:

Whichever of the Evangelists may have preserved for us the words as they were literally uttered by the heavenly voice, the others have varied the terms only with the object of setting forth the same sense more familiarly, so that what is thus given by all of them might be understood as if the expressions were: "In You I have set me good pleasure," that is to say, "by You I am doing what is my pleasure."

So, the second-person account is to be preferred. And all three of the evangelists might have done better to say "by you" rather than "with whom," "with you," or even "in you."¹

Did God Speak Greek?

Augustine leaves unanswered the question of what language God actually spoke. If it were Greek (the language in which all three Synoptic record the saying) it is unlikely that John, Jesus himself, or any of the bystanders would have understood. If God spoke in Hebrew or in Aramaic, then the issue becomes one of variant translations.

1. P. Schaaf et al., eds., *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 2nd series, 14 vols., (New York: Christian Literature, 1887–94) 6:119–20.

7.23

Mark 4:30–32—Why a Mustard Seed? (Comments from Church Tradition)

In all three Synoptic Gospels, Jesus tells a parable about a mustard seed.

Matthew 13:31–32	Mark 4:30–32	Luke 13:18–19
He put before them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.”	He also said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”	He said therefore, “What is the kingdom of God like? And to what should I compare it? It is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in the garden; it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches.”

Most interpreters have assumed Jesus chose a mustard seed for this illustration because of the obvious difference between the size of the seed (about the size of a grain of salt) and the mature plant (a shrub the size of a small tree). He might have made a similar point in modern America with an acorn and an oak tree.

From the early church on, however, some interpreters have tried to find something specific about “mustard” to extract additional meaning from the saying. Further, the mere fact that a seed is buried before it produces growth suggested imagery of death and resurrection, either of Jesus’s followers or of Jesus himself.

Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–ca. 215):

The word which proclaims the kingdom of heaven is sharp and pungent as mustard. It represses bile (anger) and checks inflammation (pride). From this word flows the soul's true vitality and fitness for eternity. To such increased size did the growth of the word come that the tree which sprang from it (that is the Church of Christ now being established over the whole earth) filled the world, so that the birds of the air (that is, holy angels and lofty souls) dwelt in its branches. (*Fragments from the Catena of Nicetas, Bishop of Heraclea* 4)¹

Ambrose (347–397):

Its seed is indeed very plain, and of little value; but if bruised or crushed it shows forth its power. So faith first seems a simple thing; but if it is bruised by its enemies it gives forth proof of its power, so as to fill others who hear or read of it with the odor of its sweetness. Our martyrs, Felix, Nabor and Victor, possessed the sweet odor of faith; but they dwelt in "obscurity. When the persecution came, they laid down their arms, and bowed their necks, and being stricken by the sword they diffused to all the ends of the earth the grace of their martyrdom. . . . The Lord himself is the grain of mustard seed. He was without injury; but the people were unaware of him as a grain of mustard seed of which they took no notice. He chose to be bruised, that we might say: "For we are the good odor of Christ unto God. ("Sermon on 'The Grain of the Mustard Seed'")²

Also, “seed” can have sexual connotations, but would that be pressing the analogy too far? To speak of Jesus impregnating his bride, the church? Let’s see.

Peter Chrysologus (406–450):

Yes, it is true: a mustard seed is indeed an image of the kingdom of God. Christ is the kingdom of heaven. Sown like a mustard seed in the garden of the virgin’s womb, he grew up into the tree of the cross whose branches stretch across the world. Crushed in the mortar of the passion, its fruit has produced seasoning enough for the flavoring and preservation of every living creature with which it comes in contact. As long as a mustard seed remains intact, its properties lie dormant; but when it is crushed they are exceedingly evident. So it was with Christ; he chose to have his body crushed, because he would not have his power concealed. . . . The man Christ received the mustard seed which represents the kingdom of God; as man he received it, though as God he had always possessed it. He sowed it in his garden, that is in his bride, the Church. The Church is a garden extending over the whole world, tilled by the plough of the gospel, fenced in by stakes of doctrine and discipline, cleared of every harmful weed by the labor of the apostles, fragrant and lovely with perennial flowers: virgins’ lilies and martyrs’ roses set amid the pleasant verdure of all who bear witness to Christ and the tender plants of all who have faith in him. Such then is the mustard seed which Christ “sowed in his garden. When he promised a kingdom to the patriarchs, the seed took root in them; with the prophets it

sprang up; with the apostles it grew tall; in the Church it became
a great tree putting forth innumerable branches laden with gifts.

(Sermon 98)³

1. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 10 vols. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1885–96), 2:578.

2. M. F. Toal, trans. and ed., *The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers: A Manual of Preaching, Spiritual Reading, and Meditation*, 4 vols. (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1958), 1:349.

3. E. Barnecut, ed., *Journey with the Fathers: Commentaries on the Sunday Gospels*, Year B (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1995), 90–91.

7.24

Mark 5:1–20—The Great Pig Massacre (Comments from Church Tradition)

The Gospel of Mark reports a remarkable tale in which Jesus disposes of a legion of demons at the expense of two thousand hogs:

They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. And when he had stepped out of the boat, immediately a man out of the tombs with an unclean spirit met him. He lived among the tombs; and no one could restrain him any more, even with a chain; for he had often been restrained with shackles and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the shackles he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones. When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and bowed down before him; and he shouted at the top of his voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me." For he had said to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion; for we are many." He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. Now there on the hillside a great herd of swine was feeding; and the unclean spirits begged him, "Send us into the swine; let us enter them." So he gave them permission. And the

unclean spirits came out and entered the swine; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and were drowned in the sea.

The swineherds ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came to see what it was that had happened. They came to Jesus and saw the demoniac sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had had the legion; and they were afraid. Those who had seen what had happened to the demoniac and to the swine reported it. Then they began to beg Jesus to leave their neighborhood. As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed by demons begged him that he might be with him. But Jesus refused, and said to him, "Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you." And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed.

Mark 5:1–20

Many modern readers have been bothered by what seems like an unnecessary loss of hog life. Some think the story smacks of cruelty to animals. Others think it describes a terrible waste of food in a land where many were hungry—not to mention the loss of income incumbent on the hog farmers.

Apparently, readers in the early church were sometimes troubled by similar questions.

John Chrysostom (349–407): The Archbishop of Constantinople

tried to answer the question this way:

Jesus did this so that you might know that the demons would have done the same thing to human beings and would have drowned them if God had allowed them to do so. But he restrained the demons, stopped them, and allowed them to do no such thing. When their power was transferred to the swine, it became clear to all witnesses what they would have done to persons. From this we learn that if the demons had the power to possess swine, they also could have possessed humans.

*(Discourses Against Judaizing Christians 8.6)*¹

Jerome (ca. 347–420): The theologian best remembered for translating the Latin Vulgate explained why it was necessary for the pigs to die in one correspondence, but then in a sermon simply told people that it is better not to ask such questions.

It need not disturb anyone that by the Lord's command two thousand swine were slain by the agency of demons, since those who witnessed the miracle would not have believed that so great a multitude of demons had gone out of the man unless an equally vast number of swine had rushed to ruin, showing that it was a legion that impelled them. *(The Life of Hilarion 32)*²

Was it just that two thousand swine perished so one soul might be saved? One seeking purity of heart had best not become preoccupied with the natural prerogative of the demonic legion or animals. It is better that each single reader reflect upon his own

soul, his own way of life, and the rarity of true excellence.

(*Homily 54*)³

1. R. J. Deferrari, ed., *Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, 86 vols.

(Washington DC: Catholic University of America, 1947–), 43:64.

2. P. Schaaf et al., eds., *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 2nd series, 14 vols. (New York: Christian Literature, 1887–94), 6:309.

3. Deferrari, ed., *Fathers of the Church*, 48:390.

7.25

Mark 6:17–29—Debauchery Abounds in the Beheading of John (Comments from Church Tradition)

The Gospel of Mark presents a vivid account of how Herod beheaded John the Baptist at the instigation of his wife, Herodias, who John had insisted could not be his legal companion (she was his half-sister).

The story involves a banquet at which Herod and other revelers are entertained by Herodias's dancing step-daughter (whose name is given elsewhere as Salome). A drunken Herod offers a rash promise to the young woman—and the fulfillment of that oath costs John his life.

Herod himself had sent men who arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because Herod had married her. For John had been telling Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed; and yet he liked to listen to him. But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee. When his daughter Herodias came in and danced, she

pleased Herod and his guests; and the king said to the girl, “Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it.” And he solemnly swore to her, “Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom.” She went out and said to her mother, “What should I ask for?” She replied, “The head of John the baptizer.” Immediately she rushed back to the king and requested, “I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter.” The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John’s head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother. When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.

Mark 6:17–29

A parallel version of the story can also be found in Matthew 14:3–11.

A Multitude of Vices

Interpreters in the early church often noted the accumulation of vices that contribute to the death of God’s prophet.

Ambrose (347–397):

It was shameful in the first place for a kingdom to be promised for a dance. And it was cruel, in the second place, for a prophet to be sacrificed for the sake of an oath. (*Duties of the Clergy* 3.12.77.2)¹

Augustine (354–430):

A girl dances, a mother rages, there is rash swearing in the midst of the luxurious feast, and an impious fulfillment of what was sworn. (*Harmony of the Gospels* 2.33.13)²

The Venerable Bede (672–735):

We hear at the same time of three evil deeds done: the inauspicious celebration of a birthday, the lewd dancing of a girl, and the rash oath of a king.

His love for the woman prevailed. She forced him to lay his hands upon a man whom he knew to be holy and just. Since he was unwilling to restrain his lechery, he incurred the guilt of homicide. What was a lesser sin for him became the occasion of a greater sin. By God's strict judgment it happened to him that, as a result of his craving for the adulteress whom he knew he ought to refuse, he caused the shedding of the blood of the prophet he knew was pleasing to God. (*Exposition on the Gospel of Mark* 2.23.1, 20)³

So here we have an interweaving of vices: lewd dancing, lechery, rage, homicide, rash oath-swearing, and inauspicious birthday celebration.

The last named has not troubled many interpreters throughout history, but “lewd dancing” and “rash oath-swearing” have received considerable attention—depending somewhat on whether John's death is to be blamed primarily on the girl or on the king.

Lewd Dancing

Ambrose (347–397):

Note how varied sins are interwoven in this one vicious action! A banquet of death is set out with royal luxury, and when a larger gathering than usual has come together, the daughter of the queen, sent for from within the private apartments, is brought forth to dance in the sight of all. What could she have learned from an adulteress but the loss of modesty? Is anything so conducive to lust as with unseemly movements to expose in nakedness those parts of the body which either nature has hidden or custom has veiled, to sport with looks, to turn the neck, to loosen the hair? (*Concerning Virgins* 3.6.27.12)⁴

John Chrysostom (ca. 349–407):

Such a captive was he to his passion, that he would give his kingdom to her for her dancing. And why do you wonder that this happened then, when even now, after so much instruction in sound doctrine, many men give away their soul for the dancing of these effeminate young men with no oath needed? They have been made captives by their pleasure and are led around like sheep wherever the wolf may drag them. (*The Gospel of St. Matthew*, Homily 49.16)⁵

Rash Oath-Swearing

The biblical story of the murder of John the Baptist would become a favorite paradigm for discouraging the taking of oaths—and, indeed,

it would become a test case for consideration of an ethical question:

If one makes a rash oath, is it less sinful to break it than to fulfill it?

Ambrose (347–397):

But what was the motive? In this case: “Because of his oath and his guests”! What could be more vile than a murder done to not displease one’s guests? (*Concerning Virgins* 3.6.28.26)⁶

Sometimes people bind themselves by a solemn oath, and, though they come to know that they ought not to have made the promise, fulfill it in consideration of their oath. This is what Herod did. For he made a shameful promise of reward to a dancer—and then cruelly performed it. But if one has made such a promise, it is far better for him not to fulfill it, than to fulfill what is shameful. (*Duties of the Clergy* 3.12.76–77)⁷

John Chrysostom (ca. 349–407):

So the princess danced and, after the dance, committed another more serious sin. For she persuaded that senseless man to promise with an oath to give her whatever she might ask. Do you see how easily swearing makes one witless? Thus, whatever she asked, he swore to give. What, then, if she were to have asked for your head, Herod? What if she were to have asked for your whole kingdom? Yet he took no thought of these things. The devil had set his trap, making it strong, and from the moment the oath was complete, he both cast his snares and stretched his net on every side . . . Do you see what swearing leads to? It cuts off the heads of prophets. You saw the bait.

Dread, then, the ruin it brings. (*Baptismal Instructions* 10.26–27.15)⁸

It is indeed a haven of safety if we do not swear at all. So whatever storms burst upon us we are in no danger of sinking. Whether it be through anger or insult or passion, be what it may, the soul is stayed securely. Even though one might have vented some chance word that ought not to have been spoken, one is not laying oneself absolutely under necessity or law. . . . For it is indeed a snare of Satan, this swearing. Let us burst these cords. Let us bring ourselves into a condition in which it will be easy not to swear. (*The Acts of the Apostles*. Homily 13.22)⁹

The Venerable Bede (672–735):

Herod found he either had to break his oath or, to avoid breaking his oath, to commit another shameful act. If it should perhaps happen that we swear carelessly to something which, if carried out, would have most unfortunate consequences, we should be willing to change it in accord with wiser counsel. There is an urgent necessity for us to break our oath, rather than turn to another more serious crime in order to avoid breaking our oath.

David swore by the Lord to kill Nabal, a stupid and wicked man, and to destroy all his possessions. But at the first entreaty of the prudent woman Abigail, he quickly took back his threats, put back his sword into its scabbard, and did not feel that he had contracted any guilt by thus breaking his oath in this way.

(1 Sam. 25:2–39)

Herod swore that he would give the dancing girl whatever she asked of him, and, to avoid being accused of breaking his oath by those who were at his banquet, he defiled the banquet with blood when he made the reward for the dancing the death of a prophet. (*Exposition of the Gospel of Mark* 2.23.1)¹⁰

In any case, John Chrysostom notes the futility of the death that was the culmination of so much wrong:

The request was abominable, but she persuaded him, and he gave the order to bridle John's holy tongue. But even now it continues to speak. For even today in every church, you can hear John still crying aloud through the Gospels. He cut off the head, but he did not cut off the voice. (*Baptismal Instructions* 10.26–27)¹¹

1. P. Schaaf et al., eds., *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 2nd series, 14 vols. (New York: Christian Literature, 1887–94), 10:80.
2. P. Schaaf et al., eds., *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 1st series, 14 vols. (New York: Christian Literature, 1887–94), 6:140.
3. *The Venerable Bede*, trans. L. T. Martin and D. Hurst (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Pubs., 1990).
4. Schaaf et al., eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd series, 10:385–86.
5. Schaaf et al., eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd series, 10:86.
6. Schaaf et al., eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd series, 10:385–86.
7. Schaaf et al., eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd series, 10:80.

8. Schaaf et al., eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 1st series, 6:140.

9. Schaaf et al., eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 1st series, 11:86–87.

10. *Venerable Bede*, trans. Martin and Hurst.

11. Schaaf et al., eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 1st series, 6:140.

7.26

Mark 9:42–48—Plucking Out Eyes and Cutting Off Hands (in Tradition and Literature)

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus says,

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’
But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust
has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right
eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for
you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be
thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it
off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your
members than for your whole body to go into hell.” (Matt. 5:27–
30)

A similar passage occurs in Mark in a different context:

“If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little
ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great
millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into
the sea. If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better
for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to
hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to
stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to
have two feet and to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes
you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the
kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be

thrown into hell, where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched.” (Mark 9:42–48)

So in Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus says that his followers should take extreme measures to avoid committing sins such as adulterous lust, and in Mark’s Gospel he says that they should take extreme measures to avoid causing others to stumble.

(Almost) Literal Interpretation

A few interpreters have taken Jesus’s words literally, believing that they can prevent sin by cutting off parts of their body. However, it was soon discovered that hands, feet, and eyes are not the main culprits in leading a person to lust. Thus some male religious extremists have practiced self-castration as a means to purify themselves from unwanted sexual desires. Matthew 19:12 is often cited in support of such an interpretation (“there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven”).

The most famous self-made eunuch in church history would be Origen (ca. 184–253), a very prominent early Christian theologian and biblical scholar. The fourth-century historian Eusebius reports that Origen castrated himself, but the accuracy of that report is now contested. Some historians claim the action would not fit well with Origen’s expressed ideas and they suspect Eusebius was duped into

reporting a rumor that had been circulated by Origen's detractors.

Others find no good reason to deny the truth of Eusebius's claims.

Metaphorical Interpretations

The recommendation to pluck out eyes or cut off hands or feet has usually been taken symbolically, but what then would be the point?

Augustine (354–430) suggests that “whatever it is that is meant by the ‘eye’ undoubtedly it is such a thing as is ardently loved. For those who wish to express their affection strongly are wont to speak thus: I love him as my own eyes . . . so that the left is indeed a beloved counselor” (“Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount,” 1.13.37–38).¹

William Tyndale (1494–1536) says, “This is not meant of the outward members [literal body parts] . . . But it is a phrase or speech of the Hebrew tongue, and will that we cut off occasions, dancing, kissing, riotous eating and drinking, and the lust of the heart, and filthy imaginations, that move a man to concupiscence.”²

Thus one may need to give up relationships (Augustine) or activities (Tyndale) that prove to be an impediment to spiritual purity.

John Calvin (1509–64) summarizes, “Christ in hyperbole bids us prune back anything that stops us offering God obedient service, as He demands in His law” (*Commentary on Matt. 5:29–30*).

Literary Allusions

The image has captured the attention of many authors and poets.³

In “A Shropshire Lad,” **A. E. Housman** (1859–1936) writes,

If it chance your eye offend you,
Pluck it out, lad, and be sound;
'Twill hurt, but here are salves to friend you,
And many a balsam grows on ground!
And if your hand or foot offend you,
Cut it off, lad, and be whole;
But play the man, stand up and end you,
When your sickness is in your soul.

In *Gone with the Wind*, by **Margaret Mitchell** (1900–1949), Rhett Butler says of his father, “Everyone admired him tremendously for having cut me off and counted me as dead. ‘If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out!’ I was his right eye, his oldest son, and he plucked me right out with a vengeance” (chap. 43).

1. P. Schaaf et al., eds. *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 1st series, 14 vols. (New York: Christian Literature, 1887–94) 1:16.

2. William Tyndale. “An Exposition upon the Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Chapters of Matthew,” in *The Works of the English Reformers: William Tyndale and John Frith*, vol. 2, ed. Thomas Russell (London: Ebenezer Palmer, 1881), 285.

3. See David Lyle Jeffrey, ed., *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 371–72.

7.27

Possible Sources for Mark's Gospel (Box 7.3)

- a collection of controversy stories, including those found now in 2:1–3:6
- a collection, or possibly two collections, of miracle stories, including many of those now found in chapters 4–8
- an apocalyptic tract containing much of what is now in chapter 13
- an early version of the passion narrative (the story of Jesus's death and resurrection)

7.28

The “Messianic Secret” in Mark’s Gospel

Elements of the “Secrecy Theme”

- Jesus silences the demons who know him (1:34; 3:11–12).
- Jesus tells people who are healed not to tell anyone about him (1:44–45; 7:35–37).
- Jesus speaks in parables so that people won’t understand what he says (4:11–12).
- Jesus’s own disciples do not understand who he is (4:41).

William Wrede’s Explanation

Mark uses the secrecy motif as a way to present information about Jesus that was not historically accurate. Mark is reporting things about Jesus for which there is no historical substantiation, and he gets away with this by claiming that these things were secrets.

Mark’s Gospel represents a position between two poles in early Christianity:

A. Earliest Tradition (Acts 2:36; Rom. 1:4; Phil. 2:6–11)

Jesus becomes the Christ and the Son of God at his resurrection. No one thought of him as Christ or Son of God during his life on earth (nor did he think of himself in those terms).

B. Later Tradition (Gospel of John)

Jesus openly presents himself as Christ and as Son of God throughout his earthly life and ministry.

Mark is somewhere in between:

Jesus is indeed the Christ and the Son of God throughout his earthly ministry, but he tries to keep this secret.

Mark wants to portray the earthly Jesus as the Christ and Son of God, but memories of his actual life as a nonmessianic, nondivine figure are too fresh. Thus Mark invents the notion that the true character of Jesus's life and ministry was a secret.¹

Paul Achtemeier's Explanation

The secrecy motif is used to downplay those aspects of Jesus's identity or biography that Mark does not find particularly helpful.

Mark considers the titles "Christ" and "Son of God" to be inadequate for Jesus.

Christ. This title could be construed as referring to a political revolutionary (the same would be true of "Son of David" and "King of the Jews").

Son of God. This title could be construed as referring to a Greek *theios anēr* ("divine man") like Prometheus or Hercules.

Therefore, Mark “corrects” these titles by having Jesus refer to himself as the “Son of Man.”

Peter, who denies Jesus and proves unfaithful, calls him “Christ” (8:29). Demons and a pagan centurion call him “Son of God” (1:24; 3:11; 5:7; 15:39). But Jesus always calls himself “Son of Man.”

Instead of suggesting that Mark wants to portray Jesus as Christ and Son of God in a manner contrary to established tradition (cf. Wrede above), this theory suggests that Mark wants to correct the established tradition that Jesus is the Christ and Son of God.²

Problems with this explanation: Mark himself also calls Jesus “Christ” as well as “Son of God” (1:1). And God calls Jesus “Son” (1:11; 9:7). Furthermore, the title “Son of Man” is itself ambiguous. Jesus seems to use it publicly precisely because it does not reveal who he is. In short, Jesus’s use of “Son of Man” for himself may be yet another aspect of the secrecy theme.

Jack Dean Kingsbury’s Explanation

The secrecy motif is a literary device. The proper question to ask is “What effect was the secrecy theme intended to have on readers of Mark’s narrative?”

One significant factor is that the readers are in on the secret. The readers are told that Jesus is the Christ and Son of God in the first verse of this Gospel, and as the story develops, the readers will realize that they know something that characters in the story do not.

The significant question for the reader is not, “Who is Jesus?,” but rather, “How will people come to know what I know about Jesus? What will reveal him to people?”

As the story progresses, the reader recognizes that Jesus’s teaching and miracles do not reveal his messianic, divine nature to people (1:27; 2:7; 4:41; 6:2–3). But when Jesus dies on the cross, then, for the first time, a human (a gentile!) recognizes him as the true Son of God (15:39).

Thus, according to this explanation, the secrecy motif is a literary device that allows Mark to tell his story in an engaging way, and more important, in a way that underscores a crucial point: the cross is the ultimate revelation of Jesus as the Christ and Son of God.³

1. See William Wrede, *The Messianic Secret*, trans. J. C. G. Greig (1901; repr. London: Clarke, 1971).

2. See Paul J. Achtemeier, *Mark* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986).

3. See Jack Dean Kingsbury, *The Christology of Mark’s Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).

7.29

Was There a “Secret Gospel of Mark”?

One of the most intriguing episodes in New Testament scholarship concerns the reputed discovery of an *alternative* version of Mark’s Gospel—indeed, an uncensored original version of his Gospel that he wrote but then edited to avoid scandal.

Imagine! What if there was an original “director’s cut” of the Gospel of Mark? What if the version we have had in our Bible all these centuries is an edited, censored version of a much more intriguing work? And what if it were possible to recover the “deleted scenes”?

What would the impact be on Christianity? Would Bibles need to be reprinted? Wouldn’t everyone want the Bible to contain the *real* Gospel of Mark? Or would that depend on just *how* controversial the deleted material turned out to be?

We will recount the story of “Secret Mark” here, as objectively as possible—but (spoiler alert!) you should know from the outset that the great majority of scholars now doubt that such a work ever existed.

Secret Mark Discovered

In 1958 Morton Smith, a respected New Testament scholar, announced that, while doing research at the Mar Saba monastery near Jerusalem, he had found an eighteenth-century copy of an

otherwise unknown letter ascribed to Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150 to ca. 215). This letter described and quoted from an alternative version of the Gospel of Mark that the author of that Gospel had produced in Alexandria. The most extensive quotation speaks of Jesus spending the night with a naked young man and instructing the latter “in the mystery of the kingdom of God.” This episode, with its homoerotic overtones, is said to be illustrative of things Mark wrote in the Alexandrian version of his Gospel, though Clement assures his reader that the evangelist did not report the Lord’s secret doings, nor did he “divulge the things not to be uttered.”

Smith photographed the manuscript of this letter but left the letter itself in the monastery—it was later photographed again in 1976 (by a library to which it had been transferred) but then it was apparently misplaced and it has never been seen again. Scholars, of course, would want to carbon date the letter and do other tests for its validity. Its disappearance seemed suspicious and contributed to widespread belief that the library had hidden or destroyed evidence that they feared would undermine traditional views of Jesus and of Scripture.

Many scholars were prepared to accept that Clement of Alexandria had written such a letter and they were grateful that we at least possessed photographs of it. A much larger question, of course, would be whether Clement was actually correct in saying that the alternative, homoerotic version of Mark’s Gospel had been written by the evangelist. Why would he compose two versions of his own

Gospel? Was it not possible that “Secret Mark” (as the alternative version of Mark’s Gospel came to be called) was composed by some group of heretics or by some obscure cult, and that Clement had simply been fooled into thinking it had any connection with the original evangelist?

For his part, Smith accepted the validity of the letter’s claim and he proposed in subsequent publications that the Secret Gospel of Mark had existed in the early church as an alternative version of the Gospel composed by the evangelist but perhaps intended for a more select audience. Another very prominent New Testament scholar, John Dominic Crossan, took the argument further. He proposed (contrary to Clement’s claim) that Mark had written only one version of his Gospel and that the now-lost Secret Mark had been that original edition. Our current Gospel of Mark, Crossan surmised, is a later, censored version.

Crossan’s argument made logical sense to many people. The notion that Mark produced two versions of his Gospel is unnecessarily complicated. Given two versions, we should surmise that either 1) somebody added homoerotic details to a Gospel that did not contain them, or 2) somebody deleted homoerotic details from a Gospel that did contain them. The latter seems much more likely, since we know of no Christians in this time period who would have wanted the story of Jesus to include such references, but we know of

many Christians who would *not* have wanted the story of Jesus to include such references.

Smith further interpreted the controversial text as implying that Jesus initiated the naked young man into a hallucinatory experience of heaven through which a freedom from the law was obtained; though Clement did not want to admit it, this freedom from the law “may have resulted in completion of the spiritual union by physical union.”¹ Crossan and other scholars would accept this interpretation and insist that, since Secret Mark predated all four of the New Testament Gospels, it probably bore witness to an aspect of Jesus’s life and ministry that was later repressed.

Secret Mark Discredited

Most scholars did not follow Smith or Crossan in accepting the validity of “Secret Mark.” It was difficult to re-envision earliest Christianity as a movement steeped in homoeroticism on the basis of a document that no longer existed. Further, there was absolutely no hint of such elements in early Christianity in any other literature, whether that of the Christians themselves or of their opponents. For many years, most scholars who investigated the matter concluded that either a) Clement was referring to an aberrant second-century version of Mark produced by some heretical group of his day, or b) some eighteenth-century person had forged a letter in Clement’s name quoting from a version of Mark’s Gospel that had never existed. As time went by, this latter “forgery theory” achieved

prominence. Not only had there never been a secret, alternative version of Mark; most likely, there also had never even been an authentic letter from Clement attesting to such a writing.

And then, in the twentieth century, things took a darker turn.

Handwriting analysis of the photographed manuscripts of Clement's letter have convinced a majority of scholars that Smith forged the document; he completely made up the idea of a variant version of Mark's Gospel and then produced the copy of a letter from Clement as an academic hoax.

Why would he do such a thing? Smith had died before these allegations surfaced and his motives for perpetrating such a hoax are unclear. Smith, an atheist, was known for provoking conventionally faithful Christians in ways that would discomfort them. However, he was always regarded as a responsible scholar, and those who knew him insist he would not have compromised historical inquiry just to antagonize the pious. Indeed, Smith himself often tried to tone down the more controversial implications of his discovery, and if he had really wanted to challenge conventional Christian values in the manner suggested, he could have composed a forged letter that did so far more explicitly.

One hypothesis is that Smith forged the letter as a way to test the scholarly guild, to see if experts would be able to discern what he had done. Some scholars (especially Stephen Carlson) claim that Smith actually scattered clues to his own authorship of the document

throughout its contents: if one reads the letter from Clement carefully, one can see that Smith composed it in ways that he thought would enable scholars to recognize its inauthenticity.

According to this thinking, Smith intended the matter to be a short-term hoax that would be quickly unmasked; everyone could have a good laugh, and the guild would recognize the need for careful scrutiny in dealing with historical documents. But then the letter itself disappeared and things got out of hand.

We must emphasize, in conclusion, that there is not yet complete consensus that the Clement letter attesting to Secret Mark was a forgery. There continue to be scholars who defend Smith's legacy and consider it a travesty that now (when he can no longer defend himself) he is being suspected and accused of professional malfeasance that contradicts his known credibility as a scholar in all other instances.

Helmut Koester of Harvard University defended the authenticity of the Secret Gospel of Mark until his death in January 2016. But Birger Pearson, of the University of California, is perhaps more representative of former Secret Mark supporters. Pearson, a scholar of noncanonical gospels who had once published works proclaiming the authenticity of the controversial work, was publicly admitting by 2012, "I was duped."

1. Morton Smith, *The Secret Gospel: The Discovery and Interpretation of the Secret Gospel according to Mark* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 113–14.

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7.30

Mark 1:21–28—Exorcism and Teaching in the Gospel of Mark

The story of an exorcism in Mark 1:21–27 is framed by two references to the teaching of Jesus:

He entered the synagogue and taught. They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, and he cried out, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.” But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be silent, and come out of him!” And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. They were all amazed, **and they kept on asking one another, “What is this? A new teaching—with authority!”**

Immediately before the exorcism, Mark reports that Jesus was teaching in the synagogue and that the people were astonished because “he taught as one having authority” (1:22). Immediately after the unclean spirit goes out of the man, the amazed spectators exclaim, “What is this? A new teaching—with authority!” (1:27). On a strictly literal level, this does not seem to make sense. Why call an exorcism a “teaching”?

References to the authority of Jesus's teaching form a frame around the story of the exorcism.

A Authority of Jesus's teaching

B Exorcism

A Authority of Jesus's teaching

Mark wants the story of Jesus's healing of the man who has an unclean spirit to be read in light of his presentation of Jesus as one whose teaching is authoritative.

Why Is the Teaching of Jesus So Important?

Mark's Gospel was written at least thirty-five years after Jesus's death. Few, if any, of his readers had ever met Jesus while he was physically on earth. When Mark tells stories of the wonderful things that Jesus did, his readers may wonder what any of this has to do with them. What difference does it make if Jesus cast an unclean spirit out of a man in Capernaum over three decades ago? Mark's readers might respond, "I wish that I had lived back then. I could have found this powerful man, Jesus, and maybe he would have fixed my problems too."

Mark knows that his readers do not have Jesus with them, at least not in the sense that he was once present on earth. But they still have the teaching of Jesus. Thus Mark tells this story to indicate that the teaching of Jesus overcomes evil in a powerful way. The

teaching of Jesus drives out what is unclean or debilitating in an astonishing manner. It is “teaching with authority.”

7.31

Mark 13—A Composite of Two Tracts? (Eschatological Discourse)

A prominent theory holds that Mark 13 is a compilation of two tracts that originally expressed different views regarding the end times. According to this theory, Mark combined the two tracts and added verse 31 as his own editorial comment.

Tract One: Prepare for an Imminent Apocalypse

As he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, “Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!” Then Jesus asked him, “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs. But when you see the desolating sacrilege set up where it ought not to be (let the reader understand), then those in Judea must flee to the mountains; the one on the housetop must not go down or enter the house to take anything away; the one in the field must not turn back to get a coat. Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing infants in those days!

“Pray that it may not be in winter. For in those days there will be suffering, such as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, no, and never will be. And if

the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would be saved; but for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he has cut short those days. But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory. Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven. From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place."

Summary of Tract One: Jesus points to events that are happening at the time this tract was written as indicators that the end was at hand.

Tract Two: Prepare for the Long Haul

When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, "Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?" Then Jesus began to say to them, "Beware that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name and say, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray. When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. As for yourselves, beware; for they will hand you over to councils; and

you will be beaten in synagogues; and you will stand before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them. And the good news must first be proclaimed to all nations. When they bring you to trial and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say; but say whatever is given you at that time, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; and you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. And if anyone says to you at that time, 'Look! Here is the Messiah!' or 'Look! There he is!'—do not believe it. False messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, the elect. But be alert; I have already told you everything. But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”

Summary of Tract Two: Jesus cautions disciples against interpreting cataclysmic events as signs that the end is near, allowing that there may still be an extended period of time that may be difficult but affords opportunity for mission.

The Composite Text

Now we can read Mark 13 as it appears in our current Bibles, with the two tracts combined. In what follows, material from tract one is printed in boldface type, material from tract two is printed in regular type, and Mark's editorial comment (v. 31) is printed in italics. Of course, this is only a representation of one scholarly theory. We do not know for certain that these tracts ever existed.

1

As he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!" Then Jesus asked him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down."

2

3

When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately,

4

"Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?"

5

Then Jesus began to say to them, “Beware that no one leads you astray.

6

Many will come in my name and say, ‘I am he!’ and they will lead many astray. When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. **For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs.**

7

When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come.

8

For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs.

9

As for yourselves, beware; for they will hand you over to councils; and you will be beaten in synagogues; and you will stand before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them.

10

And the good news must first be proclaimed to all nations.

11

When they bring you to trial and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say; but say whatever is given you at that time, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit.

12

Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death;

13

and you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

14

But when you see the desolating sacrilege set up where it ought not to be (let the reader understand), then those in Judea must flee to the mountains;

15

the one on the housetop must not go down or enter the house to take anything away; **the one in the field must not turn back to get a coat. Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing infants in those days! Pray that it may not be in winter. For in those days there will be suffering, such as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, no, and never will be. And if the Lord had**

not cut short those days, no one would be saved; but for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he has cut short those days. And if anyone says to you at that time, 'Look! Here is the Messiah!' or 'Look! There he is!'—do not believe it. False messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, the elect. But be alert; I have already told you everything.

16

the one in the field must not turn back to get a coat.

17

Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing infants in those days!

18

Pray that it may not be in winter.

19

For in those days there will be suffering, such as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, no, and never will be.

20

And if the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would be saved; but for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he has cut short those days.

21

And if anyone says to you at that time, 'Look! Here is the Messiah!' or 'Look! There he is!'—do not believe it.

22

False messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, the elect.

23

But be alert; I have already told you everything.

24

But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light,

25

and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

26

Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory.

27

Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

28

From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near.

29

So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates.

30

Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place.

31

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

32

But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

33

Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come.

34

It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch.

35

Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn,

36

or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly.

37

And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”

7.32

Mark 16:8 (Abrupt Ending of Mark)—Did Jesus’s Disciples Ever Learn of the Resurrection?

In Mark 16:6–7, the young man at the tomb tells the women,

“Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.”

But Mark 16:8 reads, “So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.”

For many Bible readers, this raises a question: If the women said “nothing to anyone,” how did the disciples ever find out about the resurrection? Indeed, quite a few scholars have suggested that Mark intends to convey the impression that the disciples of Jesus did not learn about the resurrection; they did not reunite with Jesus, and so their apostasy was never remedied.

But this seems unlikely to others. Some considerations:

- Historically, there is no question that Jesus’s disciples did proclaim him as risen from the dead and did claim to have met with him after the resurrection (see, e.g., 1 Cor. 15:5).

This was common knowledge at the time Mark's Gospel was written. Is it really conceivable, then, that Mark could have hoped to perpetrate the notion that these disciples never even heard about the resurrection? Wouldn't his readers have known better?

- The words of the young man in 16:7 are a prediction, not a mere statement of intention: "There you will see him." Furthermore, the young man's words "as he told you" imply that Jesus himself has made a similar prediction (cf. Mark 14:28). Is it conceivable that Mark intended his readers to regard predictions by God's messenger and by Jesus himself as being ultimately unfulfilled?
- Jesus speaks elsewhere in Mark's Gospel about the role that the disciples will play after his resurrection: Peter, Andrew, James, and John will be brought before governors and kings to bear testimony for Jesus's sake (13:3, 9); James and John will share his "baptism" and drink his "cup" (10:39). Is it conceivable that Mark could attribute such a role to people whom he represents as never hearing of the resurrection, or that he would portray Jesus as being so wrong about this matter?¹

Still, the silence of the women is something of a mystery. Some scholars suggest that it must be taken as temporary: the women eventually did tell the disciples, but at first they said nothing to

anyone. Most scholars regard the silence as serving a rhetorical purpose: the story is left unfinished so that readers must put themselves into the narrative and discover what could happen next. The reader is left to ask, “What would I do?”

1. The essay assumes that the Gospel of Mark originally was meant to end at 16:8. This is the majority view in current scholarship. A minority position suggests that the original ending of Mark’s Gospel has been lost.

7.33

Mark 5:1–20—Exorcism of Legion

The story of Jesus exorcising a group of demons named Legion is told in Mark 5:1–20, with parallel accounts in Matthew 8:28–34 and Luke 8:26–39. We still possess a hymn that was written about this incident in the fourth-century.

They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. And when he had stepped out of the boat, immediately a man out of the tombs with an unclean spirit met him. He lived among the tombs; and no one could restrain him any more, even with a chain; for he had often been restrained with shackles and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the shackles he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones. When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and bowed down before him; and he shouted at the top of his voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me." For he had said to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion; for we are many." He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. Now there on the hillside a great herd of swine was feeding; and the unclean spirits begged him, "Send us into the swine; let us enter them." So he gave them permission. And the

unclean spirits came out and entered the swine; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and were drowned in the sea.

The swineherds ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came to see what it was that had happened. They came to Jesus and saw the demoniac sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had had the legion; and they were afraid. Those who had seen what had happened to the demoniac and to the swine reported it. Then they began to beg Jesus to leave their neighborhood. As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed by demons begged him that he might be with him. But Jesus refused, and said to him, "Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you." And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed.

Prudentius (348–ca. 405) was a Roman Christian poet who lived in Spain and wrote numerous hymns based on biblical or theological themes. His meditation on the birth of Christ, "Of the Father's Love Begotten," remains a popular Christmas hymn in many churches to this day. Here is his hymn inspired by Jesus's exorcism of Legion:

Behold, a legion hurls headlong the swine
Of Gerasenes, and once enchained in tombs,
It loudly grunts with pain. From lips possessed
It had cried out: "O Jesus, Son of God,
Offspring of David's royal line, we know

Who you are and why you have come, what power
Expels us, at your coming filled with dread.” [see Mark 5:1–13]
Has not this voice, Judea, reached your ears?
True, but it has not pierced your darkened mind “And, driven
back, has from the threshold fled.
Now sets the evening sun, where he who beholds
The rosy dawn beholds the Lord’s advent.
The fervent gospel word
Has thawed the Scythian frosts and Hyrcanian snows,
So that Rhodopeian Hebrus, freed from ice,
Flows from Caucasian cliffs, a gentler stream.

Excerpt from “A Hymn on the Trinity”¹

1. R. J. Deferrari, ed., *Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, 86 vols.

(Washington DC: Catholic University of America, 1947–), 52:19.

7.34

Mark 6:47–52—Jesus Walks on Water

The story of Jesus walking on water is told in three of the four Gospels. We still possess a hymn written about this incident in the fourth-century.

Matthew 14:24–33	Mark 6:47–52	John 6:16–21
<p>By this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. 25 And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. 26 But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, “It is a ghost!” And they cried out in fear. 27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.”</p> <p>28 Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.”</p> <p>29 He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. 30 But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!” 31 Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” 32 When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. 33 And those in the</p>	<p>When evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. 48 When he saw that they were straining at the oars against an adverse wind, he came towards them early in the morning, walking on the sea. He intended to pass them by. 49 But when they saw him walking on the sea, they thought it was a ghost and cried out; 50 for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.” 51 Then he got into the boat with them and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, 52 for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.</p>	<p>When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, 17 got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. 18 The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. 19 When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. 20 But he said to them, “It is I; do not be afraid.” 21 Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going.</p>

boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."		
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Prudentius (348–ca. 405) was a Roman Christian poet who lived in Spain and wrote numerous hymns based on biblical or theological themes. His meditation on the birth of Christ, "Of the Father's Love Begotten," remains a popular Christmas hymn in many churches to this day. Here is his hymn inspired by Jesus walking on the water:

He walks dry-shod upon the flowing tide
And bears upon the flood with footsteps sure.
He chides the winds and bids the tempest cease.
Who would command the stormy gales: "Be still,
Your strongholds keep and leave the boundless sea,"
Except the Lord and maker of the winds? . . .

Excerpt from "A Hymn on the Trinity"¹

1. Aurelius Prudentius, *The Hymns of Prudentius*, trans. R. Martin Pope (London: J. M. Dent and Co. Aldine House, 1905).

7.35

Mark 10:13–16—“Suffer the Little Children”

A story told in all three Synoptic Gospels portrays Jesus scolding his disciples when they try to turn back people who want to bring their children to him for blessings. In the KJV, the memorable expression used in Jesus’s response was “Suffer the little children to come unto me” (in Elizabethan English, the word *suffer* meant “permit” or “allow”).

Text of the Gospel Stories in King James Version

Matthew 19:13–15	Mark 10:13–16	Luke 18:15–17
<p>Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put <i>his</i> hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them.</p> <p>But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.</p> <p>And he laid <i>his</i> hands on them, and departed thence.</p>	<p>And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and <i>his</i> disciples rebuked those that brought <i>them</i>.</p> <p>But when Jesus saw <i>it</i>, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.</p> <p>Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.</p> <p>And he took them up in his arms, put <i>his</i> hands upon them, and blessed them.</p>	<p>And they brought unto him also infants, that he would touch them: but when <i>his</i> disciples saw <i>it</i>, they rebuked them.</p> <p>But Jesus called them <i>unto him</i>, and said, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.</p> <p>Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein.</p>

“Children Brought to Christ” by W. M. Hutchings (1850): The Bible story inspired a sentimental hymn written by a London printer, William Medlen Hutchings (1827–76):

When mothers of Salem¹ their children brought to Jesus,

The stern disciples drove them back and bade them to depart:

But Jesus saw them ere they fled and sweetly smiled and kindly

said,

“Suffer little children to come unto Me.”

“For I will receive them and fold them to My bosom:

I’ll be a shepherd to these lambs, O drive them not away;

For if their hearts to Me they give, they shall with Me in glory live:

Suffer little children to come unto Me.”

How kind was our Savior to bid these children welcome!

But there are many thousands who have never heard His Name;

The Bible they have never read, they know not that the Savior

said,

“Suffer little children to come unto Me.”

O soon may the heathen of every tribe and nation

Fulfill Thy blessèd Word and cast their idols all away!

O shine upon them from above and show Thyself a God of love,

Teach the little children to come unto Thee!

1. Salem = Jerusalem

7.36

Mark 10:46–52—Blind Bartimaeus (English Poetry)

Bartimaeus, the blind beggar healed by Jesus in Mark 10:46–52, has become an icon of English poetry. Notable poets like John Newton, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and George MacDonald have composed well-known verses in his honor.

John Newton (1725–1807) was an English captain of slave ships who, following a dramatic conversion to Christianity, became an ardent abolitionist. Newton is best remembered as the author of numerous hymns, including “Amazing Grace” and “Glorious Things of Thee are Spoken.” Though not often sung, the following poem, “Mercy, O Thou Son of David,” is a hymn as well:

Mercy, O thou Son of David!
Thus blind Bartimaeus prayed;
Others by thy word are saved,
Now to me afford thine aid.

Many for his crying chide him,
But he called the louder still;
Till the gracious Saviour bid him
“Come, and ask me what you will.”

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807–82) was easily the most famous American poet of the nineteenth century, known for such

works as “Paul Revere’s Ride,” “The Song of Hiawatha,” and the epic *Evangeline*. His poem “Blind Bartimaeus” is especially interesting for two reasons: (1) in the original version, the material in italics below was printed in Greek, such that only those who read the New Testament in Greek would understand (Longfellow later repented of the idea and produced the more-famous English version of what had been called a “macaronic Greek/English poem”); and (2) Longfellow initially sent the poem to a friend (Samuel Ward) along with a letter, written the same day he had composed it and describing something of the process and inspiration (see below).

Blind Bartimaeus at the gates
Of Jericho in darkness waits;
He hears the crowd;—he hears a breath
Say, “It is Christ of Nazareth!”
And calls, in tones of agony,
“Jesus, have mercy now on me!”

The thronging multitudes increase;
Blind Bartimeus, hold thy peace!
But still, above the noisy crowd,
The beggar’s cry is shrill and loud;
Until they say, “He calleth thee!”
“Fear not! Arise! He calleth thee!”

And here is Longfellow’s comments on the poem, written to Samuel Ward in 1841:

I was reading this morning, just after breakfast, the tenth chapter of Mark, in Greek, the last seven verses of which contain the story of blind Bartimaeus, and always seemed to me remarkable for their beauty. At once, the whole scene presented itself to me in lively colors—the walls of Jericho, the cold wind through the gateway, the ragged, blind beggar, his shrill cry, the tumultuous crowd, the serene Christ, the miracle; and these things took the form I have given them above, where perforce, I have retained the striking Greek expressions of entreaty, comfort, and healing; though I am well aware that Greek was not spoken at Jericho. . . . I think I should add to the title, “supposed to be written by a monk of the Middle Ages,” as it is in that style.

George MacDonald (1824–1905) was a Scottish poet and novelist known for pioneering the genre of fantasy literature. He was a mentor of Lewis Carroll (author of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*) and was a major influence on W. H. Auden, Madeleine L’Engle, and especially C. S. Lewis (who always referred to MacDonald as “the master”). Among his better-known poems is “Blind Bartimaeus, below, which seems to assume Bartimaeus has a partner (probably because Matt. 20:29–34 recounts the healing of two blind men and could report the same event as Mark 10:46–52):

As Jesus went into Jericho town,
Twas darkness all, from toe to crown,
 About blind Bartimeus.
He said, “My eyes are more than dim,
They are no use for seeing him:

No matter—he can see us!”

“Cry out, cry out, blind brother—cry;

Let not salvation dear go by.—

Have mercy, Son of David.”

Though they were blind, they both could hear—

They heard, and cried, and he drew near;

And so the blind were saved.

8.0

Luke: Outline of Contents

- I. Prologue (1:1–4)
- II. Infancy narratives (1:5–2:52)
- III. Narratives about John the Baptist and Jesus’s baptism and temptation (3:1–4:13)
- IV. Jesus in and around Galilee (4:14–9:50)
 - A. Proclaiming the Gospel in the synagogues (4:14–44)
 - B. The mission expands and draws conflict (5:1–6:11)
 - C. The Sermon on the Plain (6:12–49)
 - D. The ministry continues throughout Galilee and environs (7:1–8:56)
 - E. Who Jesus is and what he demands (9:1–50)
- V. The journey to Jerusalem (9:51–19:44)
 - A. Teaching concerning discipleship and the kingdom (9:51–10:42)
 - B. Teaching concerning prayer (11:1–13)
 - C. Conflict with the religious leaders of Israel (11:14–54)
 - D. Teaching concerning the need for vigilance (12:1–13:9)
 - E. Teaching concerning the Kingdom of God (13:10–17:10)

F. Varied responses to Jesus and the kingdom (17:11–19:27)

G. Preparing for arrival in Jerusalem (19:28–39)

H. Jesus and his disciples arrive in Jerusalem (19:40–44)

VI. Jesus in Jerusalem (19:45–21:38)

VII. The Last Supper and the trial and death of Jesus (22:1–23:56)

VIII. Resurrection narratives (24:1–53).

Courtesy of *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, ed. Mark Allan Powell (New York:

HarperCollins, 2011), 573.

8.1

Content Summary: Expanded Overview of the Gospel of Luke

This Gospel opens with a dedication to Theophilus, for whom the author intends to write an “orderly account.” (1:1–4)

An angel appears to the high priest Zechariah and tells him that his wife, Elizabeth, will bear him a son to be named John. He is struck mute for a time for not believing this, since he and Elizabeth are aged. (1:5–25)

The angel Gabriel tells Mary of Nazareth that, although she is a virgin, she will bear a son; he is to be named Jesus and will be the Son of God. She says, “Let it be with me according to your word.” (1:26–38)

Mary visits Elizabeth, who pronounces her blessed (with words later made part of what is known as “Ave Maria”), and Mary responds with a song of praise (later known as the “Magnificat”). (1:39–56)

Elizabeth gives birth to John; Zechariah speaks a poetic prophecy (later called the “Benedictus”). (1:57–80)

Mary gives birth to Jesus after a census forces her and Joseph to travel to Bethlehem; she lays him in a manger; angels announce the news to shepherds (with words later known as “Gloria in Excelsis”). (2:1–20)

Jesus is circumcised, and then, when he is brought to the Jerusalem temple for the rite of purification, the priest Simeon prophecies over him (with words later known as the “Nunc Dimittis”); a prophet named Anna prophecies over him as well. (2:21–38)

Jesus grows, and at age twelve travels to Jerusalem with his family and stays behind in the temple when they leave. He impresses the teachers with his wisdom, and when his concerned parents return to find him there, he says, “Did you not know I must be in my Father’s house?” (2:39–52)

John the Baptist preaches in the wilderness, giving specific instructions regarding repentance and testifying to the one who is to come after him. After Jesus is baptized, the Spirit comes upon him while he is praying, and a voice says, “You are my Son.” (3:1–22)

A genealogy traces Jesus’s ancestry all the way back to Adam. (3:23–38)

Satan presents Jesus with three temptations in the wilderness. (4:1–13)

In Nazareth, Jesus identifies himself as the one whom God has anointed to bring good news to the poor, but the people are offended when he indicates his ministry may benefit others rather than them. (4:14–30)

Jesus casts a demon out of a man in a synagogue in Capernaum.

(4:31–37)

Jesus heals Simon's mother-in-law of a fever, and then he heals many others and proclaims the "good news of the kingdom of God" in the synagogues of Judea. (4:38–44)

Jesus grants Simon Peter and other fishermen a miraculously large catch of fish; Peter, James, and John become his disciples. (5:1–11)

Jesus heals a leper and the word about him draws large crowds; he regularly withdraws to pray. (5:12–16)

Jesus heals a paralyzed man who is lowered through the ceiling to him in a crowded house, but first he tells the man that his sins are forgiven; some scribes regard this as blasphemy, since only God can forgive sins. (5:17–26)

Jesus calls Levi, a tax collector, to follow him. To the chagrin of religious leaders, he eats with Levi and other tax collectors. He says, "I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance." (5:27–32)

Jesus explains why his disciples don't fast, likening his time with them to a wedding feast: they cannot fast while "the bridegroom" is still with them. (5:33–39)

Jesus justifies his disciples' picking of grain on the Sabbath: "The Son of Man is lord of the sabbath." (6:1–5)

Jesus heals a man with a withered hand in a synagogue on the Sabbath, causing the Pharisees to discuss what they might do to him. (6:6–11)

Jesus appoints twelve of his followers to be “apostles”—a group that includes the aforementioned Peter, James, and John. (6:12–16)

Jesus preaches the Sermon on the Plain (6:17–49), which includes (among other material):

- four beatitudes and four “woes”
- love your enemies, and do to others as you would have them do to you
- do not judge, but forgive; remove the log in your own eye first
- every tree is known by its fruit
- parable of two builders: the one who does what Jesus says has a solid foundation

A centurion in Capernaum sends people to Jesus, requesting that he heal his servant from a distance; Jesus is impressed by the gentile’s faith. (7:1–10)

Jesus encounters a funeral procession in Nain and raises to life the dead man, who is the only son of a widow. (7:11–17)

Jesus responds to a question from John the Baptist regarding whether Jesus is the one who was to come. He then speaks to the

crowd about John and upbraids them for having rejected John's ministry as well as his own. (7:18–35)

When Jesus dines at the home of Simon the Pharisee, a prostitute weeps at his feet, drying them with her hair. Simon is aghast, and Jesus tells a parable of two debtors and praises the woman for her great love: "Her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love." (7:36–50)

Many women accompany Jesus, providing for him and his other disciples out of their resources; these include Mary Magdalene, Joanna (the wife of Herod's steward), and Susanna. (8:1–3)

Jesus tells the parable of a sower and offers his disciples an allegorical explanation of the meaning; likewise, they are to pay attention to how they listen. (8:4–18)

Jesus's mother and brothers visit but cannot reach him because of the crowd; he says, "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it." (8:19–21)

Jesus stills a storm at sea and rebukes his fearful disciples for their lack of faith. (8:22–25)

In the area of the Gerasenes, Jesus casts a group of demons called "Legion" out of a man in a cemetery. The demons enter a herd of pigs, which run into the lake and drown. (8:26–39)

Jesus goes to heal the daughter of Jairus, a synagogue leader. Along the way, a woman with a hemorrhage touches the hem of

his garment and is healed. Jairus's daughter dies, but Jesus raises her from the dead. (8:40–56)

Jesus sends the twelve out to proclaim the kingdom of God and heal diseases; they are to depend on others to provide for them.

Meanwhile, Jesus's ministry attracts the attention of Herod, who previously beheaded John the Baptist. (9:1–9)

After the twelve return from their mission, Jesus takes them on a retreat, but multitudes follow. He feeds over five thousand people with only five pieces of bread and two fish. (9:10–17)

When Peter identifies Jesus as the "Messiah of God," Jesus warns the disciples not to tell anyone this. He predicts his passion and says that any who want to be his followers must deny themselves and bear the cross. (9:18–26)

Jesus says that some of those standing with him will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God. (9:27)

Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up a mountain and is transfigured before them; Moses and Elijah appear and they discuss Jesus's "departure"; a voice from heaven says, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" (9:28–36)

After his disciples are unable to do so, Jesus casts a demon out of a boy who has seizures. (9:37–43)

Jesus predicts his passion a second time and resolves a dispute among his disciples as to which of them is the greatest by saying

that whoever welcomes little children in his name welcomes him.

(9:44–48)

Jesus's disciples try to restrain an exorcist who they say "does not follow us," but Jesus insists, "Whoever is not against you is for you." (9:49–50)

Jesus begins a long journey to Jerusalem. (9:51)

Jesus rebukes James and John after they want to call down fire from heaven to destroy a Samaritan village that will not receive them on their way to Jerusalem. (9:52–56)

Jesus encounters three would-be disciples: an enthusiast and two procrastinators. (9:57–62)

Jesus sends out seventy disciples for a ministry of preaching and exorcisms; he upbraids cities that reject what God is doing, and he says that he saw Satan fall like lightning. (10:1–20)

Jesus rejoices that God hides truth from the wise and intelligent and reveals it to infants, just as the Son reveals the Father to whomever he chooses (i.e., his disciples). (10:21–24)

Jesus tells the parable of the good Samaritan to answer the question "Who is my neighbor?" (10:25–37)

Jesus visits a home where Martha is distracted by many tasks and criticizes her sister Mary for listening to Jesus's words instead of helping; Jesus says that Mary has chosen the "better part."

(10:38–42)

Jesus teaches the Lord's Prayer and then tells the parable of the friend at midnight to illustrate how God answers prayer and gives the Holy Spirit to those who ask (11:1–13).

The crowds say that Jesus casts out demons by the power of Beelzebul. Jesus indicates that the idea is ridiculous because a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand, but if it is by the finger of God that he casts out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon them. (11:14–23)

Jesus says that after a demon leaves a person, it seeks to return with seven more. (11:24–26)

When a woman indicates Jesus's mother is blessed to have borne him, he says, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it!" (11:27–28)

Jesus says that no sign will be given to his generation except the sign of Jonah, and they will be harshly judged. (11:29–32)

Jesus likens a healthy person to a lamp that gives plentiful light. (11:33–36)

Jesus criticizes the Pharisees as fools concerned with external purity and pronounces woes against them and against the legal experts. (11:37–54)

Jesus warns the crowds against hypocrisy and advises people to fear God more than they fear the people who persecute them; the

latter will try to make them deny him or blaspheme the Holy Spirit.

(12:1–12)

Jesus tells the parable of the rich fool: a rich man builds bigger barns to hold all of his possessions, but he is not rich toward God and will have nothing when he dies. (12:13–21)

Jesus teaches his disciples about many matters (12:22–59):

- Don't worry about having clothes or food (God clothes the grass and feeds the birds).
- Trust in God, not possessions (where your treasure is, your heart will be).
- Keep alert and faithful, as slaves waiting for their master to return.
- Jesus has come to cast fire on the earth and to cause division in households
- Judge between yourselves what is right, without going to courts.

Jesus says that victims of violence or natural disasters are not necessarily worse sinners than others, but that all who do not repent will suffer similarly. (13:1–5)

Jesus tells the parable of the fruitless tree to indicate that those who have not yet suffered calamity should not assume that judgment will not eventually come. (13:6–9)

Jesus heals a crippled woman in a synagogue on the Sabbath,
invoking the ire of the synagogue leader. (13:10–17)

Jesus compares the kingdom of God to a mustard seed and to
yeast. (13:18–21)

Jesus answers the question, “Will only a few be saved?”: the gate is
narrow, and many now first will be last. (13:22–30)

Jesus calls Herod a “fox” and compares himself to a mother hen
seeking to protect Jerusalem. (13:31–35)

Jesus heals a man who has dropsy and stumps religious leaders
with a question about healing on the Sabbath. (14:1–6)

Jesus speaks about proper behavior at banquets: people should
take the lowest seats when invited to banquets, and when they
give a banquet they should invite those who cannot reciprocate.
(14:7–14)

Jesus tells the parable of the banquet: those who are invited make
excuses and don’t come, so the host fills his house with the poor
and disadvantaged instead. (14:15–24)

Jesus speaks harsh words about the costs of discipleship (hating
one’s family, carrying the cross, giving up all possessions); he
encourages counting the cost (like a builder who would construct
a tower or a king who would go to war) so as not to become
worthless salt. (14:25–35)

Scribes and Pharisees complain that Jesus welcomes sinners and eats with them; this prompts Jesus to tell the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son. (15:1–32)

Jesus tells the parable of the dishonest steward, encouraging people not to make friends for themselves with unrighteous mammon and stating that no one can serve two masters. (16:1–13)

Jesus speaks to the Pharisees about self-justification, the coming of the kingdom, the enduring validity of the law, and the sinfulness of remarriage after divorce. (16:14–18)

Jesus tells the parable of the rich man and Lazarus: after death, the rich man is in torment, beholding the poor beggar Lazarus in the bosom of Abraham. (16:19–31)

Jesus speaks to his disciples about not causing others to stumble, about the power of faith, and about identifying themselves as “worthless slaves.” (17:1–10)

Jesus heals ten lepers but only one gives thanks, and he is a Samaritan. (17:11–19)

Jesus responds to a question of when the kingdom is coming: “The kingdom of God is among you.” (17:20–21)

Jesus speaks of the coming of the Son of Man as a time of sudden judgment. (17:22–37)

Jesus tells the parable of the widow and the unjust judge to encourage persistence in prayer. (18:1–8)

Jesus tells the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector as a warning against self-righteousness. (18:9–14)

Jesus's disciples try to prevent people from bringing children to him, but Jesus says, "Let the little children come to me . . . to such as these the kingdom of God belongs." (18:15–17)

A rich man goes away sad because he cannot give up his possessions to follow Jesus. Jesus says that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God. (18:18–27)

Jesus assures his disciples, who left their homes to follow him, that they will receive abundant rewards in this life and more in the age to come. (18:28–30)

Jesus predicts his passion a third time, but the meaning is hidden from his disciples. (18:31–34)

Jesus heals a blind beggar in Jericho; the beggar follows him, glorifying God. (18:35–43)

In Jericho Jesus welcomes Zacchaeus, a rich tax collector who had climbed a tree to see him; Jesus says, "The Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost." (19:1–10)

Jesus tells the parable of the pounds: the slave who does not invest the money is condemned. (19:11–27)

Jesus enters Jerusalem riding a colt, as a crowds bless him and lay their cloaks in his path. (19:28–40)

Jesus weeps over Jerusalem for having failed to recognize the time of its visitation, and then he drives out people who are selling things in the temple and teaches there for days. (19:41–48)

Religious leaders ask Jesus by what authority he is acting, but he refuses to answer them because they will not respond to his own question regarding the baptism of John. (20:1–8)

Jesus tells the parable of the wicked tenants: the owner of a vineyard sends a series of servants, then finally his son, to collect fruit from tenants, who beat the servants and kill the son. (20:9–19)

Religious leaders try to trap Jesus by asking him whether it is lawful to pay taxes to Caesar. He says, “Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” (20:20–26)

Sadducees test Jesus with a question: If a woman was married to seven men in this life, whose wife will she be in the resurrection? He says that there is no marriage in heaven, for people are like angels. (20:27–40)

Jesus stumps the religious leaders by asking them how the Messiah can be the son of David when David calls him “Lord.” (20:41–44)

Jesus denounces the scribes for being ostentatious and greedy. and then calls attention to the generosity of a poor widow who puts her last two coins into the temple treasury. (20:45–21:4)

Jesus tells his disciples that the Jerusalem temple will be destroyed.

Then he launches into a long discourse on the end times, emphasizing the terrible persecutions to come and urging people to be ready at all times. (21:5–38)

Satan enters into Judas, who agrees to cooperate with the religious leaders to betray Jesus. (22:1–6)

At the Passover meal, Jesus identifies the bread and wine as his body and blood and tells the disciples to share the meal in remembrance of him; the disciples argue over which of them is the greatest, and he identifies greatness with service. (22:7–27)

Jesus confers a kingdom on his disciples, who have stood by him in his trials. He predicts Simon's temporary denial of him and tells them that henceforth they must carry bags and swords. (22:28–38)

Jesus and the disciples go out to Gethsemane, where he prays that, if possible, God remove the cup from him. He is arrested, and Peter denies him three times. (22:39–62)

Jesus is put on trial before an assembly of religious leaders, who decide that he deserves death. (22:63–71)

Jesus is turned over to Pilate, who sends him to be questioned by Herod; he is returned to Pilate, and a crowd calls for him to be crucified and a murderer, Barabbas, to be released. (23:1–25)

Simon of Cyrene carries Jesus's cross, and as Jesus is led to his death, he calls out to the "daughters of Jerusalem" who are weeping for him to save their tears for terrible days to come. (23:26–31)

Jesus is crucified, and he speaks three times from the cross: "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing"; "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise" (to a thief crucified with him); "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit"; when he dies, the centurion says, "Certainly this man was innocent." (23:32–49)

Joseph of Arimathea, a righteous man, provides a tomb for Jesus's burial, and the women who have been following Jesus observe where his body is laid. (23:50–56)

On the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and another Mary come to the tomb and are told by two men in dazzling clothes that Jesus is risen; they report this to the apostles, who dismiss it as "an idle tale." Peter decides to go to the tomb, sees that it is empty, and is amazed. (24:1–12)

Jesus appears to Cleopas and one other person on the road to Emmaus, but they do not recognize him until they see him break bread; reporting to the others, they learn that Jesus has also appeared to Simon. (24:13–35)

Jesus suddenly stands among his disciples and eats fish in their presence; he commissions them to proclaim repentance and

forgiveness in his name and promises that they will be clothed
with power from on high. (24:36–49)

At Bethany, Jesus blesses his disciples and ascends into heaven;
the disciples return to Jerusalem and worship God in the temple.
(24:50–53)

8.2

Material Unique to Luke's Gospel (Box 8.1)

This corresponds to what scholars sometimes refer to as the “L” material.

Dedication to Theophilus	1:1–4
Promised birth of John	1:5–25
Announcement of Jesus's birth to Mary	1:26–38
Mary's visit to Elizabeth	1:39–56
Birth of John the Baptist	1:57–80
Birth of Jesus (with shepherds, manger)	2:1–20
Presentation of infant Jesus in temple	2:21–38
Childhood visit to Jerusalem	2:41–52
John's reply to questions	3:10–14
Genealogy of Jesus (to Adam)	3:23–38
Good news to the poor	4:14–23, 25–30
Miraculous catch of fish	5:1–11
Raising of widow's son at Nain	7:11–17
Encounter with homeless woman	7:36–50
Parable of two debtors	7:40–43
Ministering women	8:1–3
Rejection by Samaritan village	9:51–56
Return of the seventy missionaries	10:17–20
Parable of good Samaritan	10:29–37
Mary and Martha	10:38–42
Parable of friend at midnight	11:5–8
Parable of rich fool	12:13–21
Parable of severe and light beatings	12:47–48
Parable of barren tree	13:1–9
Healing of crippled woman	13:10–17
Healing of man with dropsy	14:1–6
Two parables for guests and hosts	14:7–14
Counting the cost (two parables)	14:28–33
Parable of lost coin	15:8–10
Parable of prodigal son	15:11–32

Parable of shrewd manager	16:1–12
Parable of rich man and Lazarus	16:19–31
Cleansing of ten lepers	17:11–19
Parable of widow and judge	18:1–8
Parable of Pharisee and tax collector	18:9–14
Story of Zacchaeus	19:1–10
Jesus weeps over Jerusalem	19:41–44
Reason for Peter's denial	22:31–32
Two swords	22:35–38
Jesus before Herod	23:6–12
Pilate declares Jesus innocent	23:13–16
Sayings associated with Jesus's death	23:28–31, 34, 43, 46
Jesus appears on road to Emmaus	24:13–35
Jesus appears to disciples	24:36–49
Jesus's ascension	24:50–53

8.3

Passages from Mark Omitted by Luke

According to the dominant source theories, the author of Luke's Gospel drew much of his material from the Gospel of Mark but chose not to use certain passages.

Omitted also by Matthew	Part of "Great Omission" or "Little Omission"*	Mark	Description
X		3:21	Jesus's family comes to seize him
X		4:26–29	Parable of seed growing secretly
	X	6:47–52	Jesus walks on water
	X	6:53–56	Healings in Gennesaret
	X	7:1–23	Eating with defiled hands
	X	7:24–30	Teaching on defilement
X	X	7:31–37	Healing of deaf man
	X	8:1–10	Feeding of the four thousand
	X	8:11–13	Pharisees ask for a sign
	X	8:14–21	Discourse on bread and leaven
X	X	8:22–26	Healing of blind man of Bethsaida
		9:9–13	Elijah must come first
	X	9:41–48	Reward and punishment
	X	9:49–50	On being salty
	X	10:–12	On marriage and divorce
		10:35–40	Question from the sons of Zebedee
		11:12–14	Cursing of the fig tree
		11:20–25	Lesson of the fig tree
		14:3–9	Anointing in Bethany (but see Luke 7:36–50)
		15:16–20	Mocking of Jesus by soldiers
* "Great Omission" = Mark 6:45–8:26; "Little Omission" = Mark 9:41–10:12. Since Luke omits everything from these sections of Mark, some scholars wonder if his copy of Mark was defective.			

8.4

Women in the Gospel of Luke

Women are mentioned frequently in all four of the New Testament Gospels, but they are especially prominent in Luke:

Passage	Brief Description
Luke 1:5–7	Zechariah’s wife Elizabeth is named; both are righteous and old
Luke 1:13, 18	Gabriel and Zechariah each mention Elizabeth briefly
Luke 1:24–25	Elizabeth conceives and praises God for taking away her “disgrace” (of being barren)
Luke 1:26–38	Annunciation: Gabriel visits Mary to proclaim Jesus’s birth; Mary agrees to cooperate
Luke 1:39–56	Mary visits Elizabeth; Elizabeth praises Mary; Mary praises God in the “Magnificat”
Luke 1:57–61	Elizabeth gives birth to John and she names him
Luke 2:5–7	Mary goes with Joseph to Bethlehem and gives birth to her firstborn child
Luke 2:15–20	Shepherds visit Mary and Joseph; Mary treasures all things in her heart (v. 19)
Luke 2:22, 27	“ They ” go to Jerusalem for “their” purification; Simeon speaks to both “parents”
Luke 2:34–35	Simeon speaks directly to Mary : a sword shall pass through her heart
Luke 2:36–38	Prophet-widow Anna praises God and speaks to the people about Jesus
Luke 2:41–51	Both “parents” take Jesus to Jerusalem; his mother speaks (v. 48) and “treasures” all (v. 51)
Luke 3:19	Wicked Herodias mentioned only very briefly (contrast Mark 6:17–29)
Luke 4:25–26	Jesus cites the Old Testament stories of the widows of Israel and the widow of Zarephath
Luke 4:38–39	Jesus heals Simon’s mother-in-law ; she then immediately serves them all
Luke 7:11–17	Jesus has compassion for a widow in Nain , and so restores her only son to life
Luke 7:28	“Among those born of women no one is greater than John” (the Baptist)

Luke 7:35	“Wisdom is vindicated by all her children”
Luke 7:36–50	A sinful woman anoints Jesus and is forgiven; she is contrasted to Simon the Pharisee
Luke 8:1–3	Several women are named who accompany Jesus and provide for the disciples
Luke 8:19–21	Jesus’s mother and brothers come; those who hear and do God’s word are his mother and brothers
Luke 8:40–42, 49–56	Jesus restores Jairus’s daughter to life; child’s parents both mentioned (vv. 51, 56)
Luke 8:43–48	Jesus heals a hemorrhaging woman ; she takes the initiative and is praised for her faith
Luke 10:38–42	Martha serves and complains while Mary sits at Jesus’s feet (like a disciple) and is praised
Luke 11:27–28	A woman says, “Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you!”
Luke 11:31	The Queen of the South used as a positive example; she came to hear Solomon’s wisdom
Luke 12:45	In a parable, both men and women slaves are beaten by a wicked manager
Luke 12:53	Families will be divided: father and son, mother and daughter, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law
Luke 13:10–17	On the Sabbath, Jesus cures a woman crippled for eighteen years
Luke 13:20–21	Parable of the Kingdom of God being like a woman mixing yeast and flour
Luke 13:34	Jesus wants to gather Jerusalem’s children like a mother hen protects her brood
Luke 14:26	Disciples must “hate” father, mother, wife , children, brothers, sisters
Luke 15:8–10	Parable of a woman who lost and found a coin, then rejoices with her friends
Luke 16:18	Brief saying against men divorcing their wives or marrying divorced women
Luke 17:26–27	In the days of Noah, people were marrying and giving in marriage
Luke 17:32	“Remember Lot’s wife ”
Luke 17:35	Two women will be grinding grain: one will be taken, one left
Luke 18:1–8	Parable of a widow fighting for her rights against an unjust judge
Luke 18:20	“Honor your father and mother ” (cited from Exod. 20:12)
Luke 18:28–30	Disciples who have left wives , brothers, parents , children, and so on will be rewarded

Luke 20:27–36	Sadducees question the resurrection with story of a woman who had seven husbands
Luke 21:1–4	Poor widow's small offering is worth more than the offerings of rich people
Luke 21:23–24	Alas for pregnant and nursing women in the days of Jerusalem's destruction
Luke 22:56–57	Peter's first denial comes after a servant girl challenges him
Luke 23:27–31	Jesus speaks to wailing women in the crowd on the way to his crucifixion
Luke 23:49	The women from Galilee watch Jesus's crucifixion from a distance
Luke 23:55–56	The women see where Jesus is buried and prepare spices and ointments
Luke 24:1–11	The women find Jesus's tomb empty; two messengers speak with them; they remember Jesus's words and go tell the other disciples, who don't believe them
Luke 24:22–24	Two disciples (two men? a married couple? "Cleopas" in 24:18) on the road to Emmaus tell Jesus how some women of their group went to the tomb that morning and saw a vision of angels

8.5

Worship in the Gospel of Luke

Events

Mary magnifies (*megalynō*) the Lord when she visits Elizabeth (1:46).

Zechariah blesses (*eulogeō*) God at the birth of John (1:64).

Angels praise (*aineō*) and give glory (*doxa*) to God when Jesus is born (2:13–14).

Shepherds praise (*aineō*) and glorify (*doxazō*) God after seeing the baby Jesus (2:20).

Simeon blesses (*eulogeō*) God when presented with the baby Jesus (2:28).

Anna serves/worships (*latreuō*) God with prayer and fasting in the temple (2:37).

Jesus is glorified (*doxazō*) by all when he teaches in synagogues (4:15).

A paralytic glorifies (*doxazō*) God after he is healed by Jesus (5:25).

People glorify (*doxazō*) God after Jesus heals a paralytic (5:26).

A crowd glorifies (*doxazō*) God after Jesus raises a widow's son from the dead (7:16).

A woman glorifies (*doxazō*) God after Jesus heals her (13:13).

A leper glorifies (*doxazō*) God after Jesus heals him (17:15).

A leper prostrates himself to give thanks (*eucharisteō*) to Jesus for healing him (17:16).

In a parable told by Jesus, a Pharisee gives thanks (*eucharisteō*) to God that he is not like other people (18:11).

A blind man glorifies (*doxazō*) God after he is healed by Jesus (18:43).

People give praise (*ainos*) to God after Jesus heals a blind man (18:43).

When Jesus enters Jerusalem, a multitude of disciples praise (*aineō*) God for all the mighty works they have seen (19:37).

A centurion glorifies (*doxazō*) God when he witnesses Jesus's death on the cross (23:47).

Jesus's disciples worship (*proskyneō*) him when he ascends into heaven (24:52). (Text uncertain.)

Jesus's disciples bless (*eulogeō*) or praise (*aineō*) God in the temple after the ascension (24:53). (Wording uncertain.)

Also:

Jesus rejects the temptation to worship (*proskyneō*) the devil (4:7–8).

Sayings

Zechariah prophesies that, being delivered from the hands of their enemies, God's people will serve/worship (*latreuō*) God without fear (1:74).

Jesus quotes Scripture to Satan: "Worship [*proskyneō*] the Lord your God, and serve [*latreuō*] only him" (4:8).

After Jesus heals ten lepers, he asks why only one (a foreigner) returns to give glory (*doxa*) to God (17:18).

8.6

Luke in the Revised Common Lectionary

Text	Content	Series	Liturgical Occasion	Calendar Date
1:26–38	Annunciation	B	Advent 4	4 Sundays before Dec. 25
1:39–45 (46–55)	Magnificat	C	Advent 4	4 Sundays before Dec. 25
2:1–20	Birth of Jesus	A, B, C	Christmas Eve	Dec. 24
2:22–40	Presentation of infant Jesus in temple	B	Christmas 1	1 Sunday after Dec. 25
2:41–52	Jesus at age twelve in temple	C	Christmas 1	1 Sunday after Dec. 25
3:1–6	Ministry of John the Baptist	C	Advent 2	3 Sundays before Dec. 25
3:7–18	Preaching of John the Baptist	C	Advent 3	2 Sundays before Dec. 25
3:15–17, 21–22	Baptism of Jesus	C	Epiphany 1	Jan. 7–13
4:1–13	Temptation of Jesus	C	Lent 1	6 Sundays before Easter
4:14–21	Jesus reads from Isaiah in Nazareth	C	Epiphany 3	Jan. 21–27
4:21–30	Rejection of Jesus in Nazareth	C	Epiphany 4	Jan. 28–Feb 3
5:1–11	Miraculous catch of fish	C	Epiphany 5	Feb. 4–10
6:20–31	Blessings and woes	C	All Saints	Nov. 1
6:39–49	Hypocrisy and obedience	C	Epiphany 8	Feb. 25–March 1
6:39–49	Hypocrisy and obedience	C	Lectionary 8	May 24–28
7:1–10	Healing of centurion's servant	C	Lectionary 9	May 29–June 4
7:11–17	Raising of widow's son in Nain	C	Lectionary 10	June 5–11
7:36–8:3	Woman washes	C	Lectionary 11	June 12–18

	Jesus's feet			
8:26–39	Healing of Gerasene demoniac	C	Lectionary 12	June 19–25
9:28–36 (37–43a)	Transfiguration of Jesus	C	Transfiguration	7 Sundays before Easter
9:51–62	Samaritan rejection; hard sayings	C	Lectionary 13	June 26–July 2
10:1–11, 16–20	Mission of the seventy	C	Lectionary 14	July 3–9
10:25–37	Parable of good Samaritan	C	Lectionary 15	July 10–16
10:38–42	Jesus at Mary and Martha's house	C	Lectionary 16	July 17–23
11:1–13	Lord's Prayer; parable of friend at midnight	C	Lectionary 17	July 24–30
12:13–21	Parable of rich fool	C	Lectionary 18	July 31–Aug. 6
12:32–40	Preparation for the Lord's return	C	Lectionary 19	Aug. 7–13
12:49–56	Jesus a source of division	C	Lectionary 20	Aug. 14–20
13:1–9	Siloam tower; parable of fig tree	C	Lent 3	4 Sundays before Easter
13:10–17	Healing of crippled woman	C	Lectionary 21	Aug. 21–27
13:31–35	Ode to Jerusalem	C	Lent 2	5 Sundays before Easter
14:1, 7–14	Parables of table etiquette	C	Lectionary 22	Aug. 28–Sept. 3
14:25–33	Counting costs and hating life	C	Lectionary 23	Sept. 4–10
15:1–10	Parables of lost sheep and lost coin	C	Lectionary 24	Sept. 11–17
15:1–3, 11b–32	Parable of lost son	C	Lent 4	3 Sundays before Easter
16:1–13	Parable of unjust steward	C	Lectionary 25	Sept. 18–24
16:19–31	Parable of rich man and Lazarus	C	Lectionary 26	Sept. 25–Oct. 1
17:5–10	Tiny faith; expect no	C	Lectionary 27	Oct. 2–8

	reward			
17:11–19	Healing of ten lepers	C	Lectionary 28	Oct. 9–15
18:1–8	Parable of widow and unjust judge	C	Lectionary 29	Oct. 16–22
18:9–14	Parable of Pharisee and tax collector	C	Lectionary 30	Oct. 23–29
19:1–10	Jesus meets Zacchaeus	C	Lectionary 31	Oct. 30–Nov. 5
20:27–38	Question from Sadducees	C	Lectionary 32	Nov. 6–12
21:5–19	Signs of the end	C	Lectionary 33	Nov. 13–19
21:25–36	Coming of the Son of Man	C	Advent 1	4 Sundays before Dec. 25
23:1–49	Jesus condemned, crucified	C	Passion Sunday	1 Sunday before Easter
23:33–43	Crucifixion of Jesus	C	Christ the King	Nov. 20–26
24:1–12	Resurrection of Jesus	C	Easter Day	Easter
24:13–35	Walk to Emmaus	A	Easter 3	2 Sundays after Easter
24:36b–48	Risen Jesus appears to disciples	B	Easter 3	2 Sundays after Easter
24:44–53	Ascension of Jesus	A, B, C	Ascension Day	6 Thursdays after Easter

8.7

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- . *Luke and the Law*. SNTSMS 50. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983. Argues that Luke conceives of the Jewish law as applicable only to Jewish people and thus as nonbinding for gentile Christians.
- . *Luke and the Pastoral Epistles*. London: SPCK, 1979. A comparative analysis that suggests that the author of Luke-Acts also wrote the Pastoral Epistles.

8.8

Distinctive Characteristics of Luke's Gospel

A. Luke's Gospel begins with an extensive prologue.

- dedication to Theophilus (1:1–4)
- announcement of births (John and Jesus) (1:5–56)
- birth of John and Jesus (1:57–2:21)
- presentation of infant Jesus in the temple (2:22–38)
- Jesus grows and at age twelve goes to the temple (2:39–52)

B. Luke's Gospel also has a sequel, the Book of Acts.

C. Events reported in Luke's Gospel are tied to their historical context.

- Herod the king (1:5)
- Caesar Augustus (2:1–2)
- Tiberius Caesar (3:1–2)

D. Jerusalem receives special emphasis in Luke's Gospel.

- Jesus makes childhood visits to Jerusalem (2:22–52).
- Ten chapters are devoted to Jesus's journey to Jerusalem (9:51–19:40).
- Jesus weeps over Jerusalem (19:41–44).

- Resurrection appearances occur in and around Jerusalem (24:13–43).
- Jesus tells disciples to stay in Jerusalem (24:44–49).

E. Luke’s Gospel emphasizes worship and prayer.

Luke’s Gospel begins (1:8) and ends (24:53) with scenes of worship.

Liturgical material:	1:46–55	Magnificat
	1:68–79	Benedictus
	2:14	Gloria in Excelsis
	2:29–32	Nunc Dimittis
Jesus at prayer:	3:21	at his baptism
	5:16	in deserted places
	6:12	on choosing his disciples
	9:18	alone, with disciples nearby
	9:28–29	at his transfiguration
	11:1	in presence of his disciples
	22:41, 44–45	in the garden
Also:	instruction in prayer (11:2–4)	
	three parables on prayer (11:5–8; 18:1–8, 9–14)	
	encouragement to pray (6:28; 18:1; 21:36; 22:40, 46)	
Even Jesus’s death is an occasion for glorifying God (23:47).		

F. Luke’s Gospel emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit.

- Jesus is conceived by the Spirit (1:35) and anointed with the Spirit (3:22; 4:1, 14, 18).
- People are filled with the Spirit (1:15, 41, 67) and inspired by the Spirit (2:25–27).
- God gives the Holy Spirit to all who ask (11:13).

- The disciples will be “clothed with power from on high” (24:49).

G. Luke’s Gospel seems to have an unusual interest in food.

- food for the hungry (1:53; 6:25)
- table etiquette (7:44–46; 14:7–14; 22:27)
- banquet parables (14:7–11, 12–14, 15–24; 15:25–32; 16:19–30)
- Jesus is present at nineteen meals; is criticized for eating too much and with the wrong people (7:34; cf. 5:30, 33; 15:2; 19:7)

H. Salvation is an important theme in Luke’s Gospel.

- Jesus is born as Savior (2:11; cf. 2:30).
- People are “saved” by faith (7:50; 8:48).
- Salvation comes to Zacchaeus’s house (19:9).
- The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost (19:10).
- A thief finds Paradise (23:42–43).

I. Luke’s Gospel emphasizes concern for the excluded.

- Samaritans (9:51–56; 10:29–37; 17:11–19)
- Gentiles (2:32; 3:23–38; 4:24–27; 7:1–10; 24:47)
- Tax collectors (5:27–32; 7:34; 15:1–2; 18:9–14; 19:1–10 [cf. 3:12])

- Women (1:26–56; 2:36–38; 7:11–17, 36–50; 8:2, 42–48;
10:38–42; 21:1–4; 23:27–31; 23:55–24:11)

The poor (1:53; 4:18; 6:20; 7:22; 14:13, 21; 16:20–22; 19:8;
21:2–3) (cf. the rich: 1:53; 6:24; 12:16–21; 16:1–9, 19–31;
19:1–10)

8.9

Parallel Stories of Jesus and John the Baptist in Luke

Luke's Gospel tells the infancy stories of John the Baptist and Jesus through a series of parallel segments:

	John the Baptist	Jesus
Luke introduces the parents of the child-to-be.	1:5–7	1:26–27
An angel announces the child's birth.	1:8–23	1:28–38
The mother responds to God's announced plan.	1:24–25	1:39–56
The baby is born.	1:57–58	2:1–20
The baby is circumcised and named.	1:59–66	2:21–24
Prophecy is offered concerning the child.	1:67–79	2:25–38
The child grows and matures.	1:80	2:40–52

8.10

Two Christmas Stories: Similarities and Differences

Similarities		
Jesus is born in Bethlehem during the days of Herod but spends his youth in Nazareth.	Matt. 2:1, 5–6, 23	Luke 2:4–6, 11, 15, 39
Jesus belongs to the family of David.	Matt. 1:1, 6	Luke 2:4; 3:31
Mary is the mother of Jesus, and Joseph is his legal father.	Matt. 1:16–21, 25	Luke 1:35; 2:16, 41, 48
Jesus is born from a miraculous virginal conception announced in advance by an angel.	Matt. 1:18–25	Luke 1:26–38
The name “Jesus” is chosen by God.	Matt. 1:21	Luke 1:31
The family of Jesus must undertake difficult travel due to oppressive political rule.	Matt. 2:7–8, 12–18	Luke 2:1–7
Jesus’s birth is presented as the fulfillment of scriptural promises to Israel.	Matt. 1:22–23; 2:5–6	Luke 1:54–55
Even at birth, Jesus is rejected by some and inspires worship in others.	Matt. 2:10–11, 16–18	Luke 2:7, 20

Differences	
Matthew explains why the family must move from Bethlehem to Nazareth.	Matt. 2:13, 19–23
Luke explains why they must travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem.	Luke 2:2–5
In Matthew, the genealogy of Jesus runs from Abraham to Jesus.	Matt. 1:1–16
In Luke, the genealogy runs in the opposite direction, from Jesus to Adam.	Luke 3:23–38
In Matthew, Joseph is the central character of the story.	Matt. 1:18–25
In Luke, the central character is Mary.	Luke 1:26–56
In Matthew, the angel comes to Joseph to announce the virginal conception.	Matt. 1:20–21
In Luke, this angelic announcement is made to Mary.	Luke 1:26–38

In Matthew, Jesus is given an additional name, "Immanuel."	Matt. 1:23
In Luke, Jesus is given an additional name (or title), "Son of the Most High God."	Luke 1:32
In Matthew, the family of Jesus must flee the wrath of King Herod.	Matt. 2:13–22
In Luke, Caesar Augustus is responsible for the family's burdensome travel.	Luke 2:1–5
In Matthew, the events are said to fulfill quotations from the Old Testament that are cited directly.	Matt. 1:22; 2:15, 17, 23
In Luke, Old Testament Scriptures provide the background for various hymns and canticles.	Luke 1:46–55, 68–79; 2:14, 29–32
In Matthew, the birth of Jesus is noticed by the powerful and the wealthy, who respond with either worship or fear.	Matt. 2:1–12
In Luke, the birth is revealed to peasants who respond with both fear and worship.	Luke 2:8–20

8.11

Male-Female Parallels in the Gospel of Luke (Box 8.4)

Male		Female	
1:5–25	annunciation to Zechariah	1:26–38	annunciation to Mary
1:67–79	song of Zechariah	1:46–56	song of Mary
2:25–35	prophecy of Simeon	2:36–38	prophecy of Anna
4:27	man from Syria	4:25–26	woman from Sidon
4:31–37	demon in man rebuked	4:38	fever in woman rebuked
5:19–26	desperate man forgiven	7:35–50	desperate woman forgiven
6:12–16	list of male followers	8:1–3	list of female followers
7:1–10	man's servant saved from death	7:11–17	widow's son saved from death
11:32	men of Nineveh	11:31	queen of the South
13:18–19	man with a mustard seed	13:20–21	woman with yeast
14:1–4	man healed on Sabbath	13:10–17	woman healed on Sabbath
15:4–7	man loses a sheep	15:8–10	woman loses a coin
17:34	two men asleep	17:35	two women at mill

8.12

Salvation in the Gospel of Luke (Box 8.6)

This chart lists the passages in Luke’s Gospel in which the words *sōtēr* (“savior”), *sōtēria* (“salvation”), *sōtēria* (“salvation”), or *sōzein* (“to save”) are used.

Text	Who Is to Be Saved?	Of What Does Salvation Consist?	Who or What Brings Salvation?	How Is Salvation Received?
1:47	Mary	blessedness (1:42, 48)	God	faith (1:45)
1:69, 71	Israel	rescue from enemies	God	_____
1:77	the Lord’s people	forgiveness	John (1:76)	_____
2:11	shepherds	peace (2:24)	Christ	_____
2:30	all people	revelation, glory	Jesus (1:27)	_____
3:6	all flesh	forgiveness (3:3)	John	baptism
6:9	man with infirmity	healing	word of Jesus	_____
7:50	sinner (7:37)	forgiveness	word of Jesus	faith
8:12	ones along the path	_____	word of God	faith
8:36	demoniac	exorcism	word of Jesus	_____
8:48	woman with infirmity	healing	power of Jesus	faith
8:50	Jairus’s daughter	resuscitation	word of Jesus	faith
9:24	whoever	_____	_____	self-denial
13:23	a few	feasting in God’s reign	_____	effort
17:19	leper	being made clean	Jesus	faith
18:26	who?	entering God’s reign	God	_____
18:42	blind man	reception of sight	word of Jesus	faith
19:9, 10	Zacchaeus	being a child of Abraham	Jesus	renunciation

8.13

Luke's Use of "Today" (Box 8.5)

"Today . . . a Savior is born" (2:11)

"Today . . . this scripture is fulfilled" (4:21)

"Today . . . we have seen strange things" (5:26)

"Today . . . I must stay at your house" (19:5)

"Today . . . salvation has come to this house" (19:9)

"Today . . . you will be with me in Paradise" (23:43)

8.14

The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke

Theme: Jesus Is Innocent

Pilate declares three times that Jesus is innocent (23:4, 14, 22).

A thief on a cross says that Jesus has done nothing wrong (23:41).

A centurion says, “Certainly this man was innocent” (23:47).

Theme: Jesus’s Death Is His Destiny

Jesus predicts his passion three times and says that it is “necessary” for him to die (9:22, 44; 18:31).

Jesus says at the Last Supper, “The Son of Man is going as it has been determined” (22:22).

Jesus views his death as the will of the Father (22:42).

Jesus views his passion as the fulfillment of Scripture (18:31; 22:37; 24:25–27; 24:44–46).

After his resurrection, Jesus explains three times that his passion was “necessary” (24:7, 26, 44).

Theme: Jesus’s Death Confirms His Life

Jesus is God’s great benefactor to all, in death as in life.

- He brings healing (22:51).
- He brings forgiveness (23:34).

- He brings salvation (23:43).

Jesus's death causes people to praise God and to repent (23:47–48).

Theme: Jesus's Death Provides a Model for Discipleship

In the events leading up to his death, Jesus explains the nature of discipleship (22:24–27), prepares his disciples for trials ahead (22:35–38), and models for them the necessary perseverance in prayer (22:39–46).

Jesus's trial becomes the model for the trials of Paul (Acts 16:19–24; 18:12–17; 23:23–30) and his death a model for that of Stephen (Acts 7:59–60).

8.15

Parallels between Luke's Gospel and the Book of Acts (Box 10.4)

Luke's Gospel	Acts
Preface to Theophilus (1:1–4)	Preface to Theophilus (1:1–5)
Spirit descends on Jesus as he prays (3:21–22)	Spirit comes to apostles as they pray (2:1–13)
Sermon declares prophecy fulfilled (4:16–27)	Sermon declares prophecy fulfilled (2:14–40)
Jesus heals a lame man (5:17–26)	Peter heals a lame man (3:1–10)
Religious leaders attack Jesus (5:29–6:11)	Religious leaders attack apostles (4:1–8:3)
Centurion invites Jesus to his house (7:1–10)	Centurion invites Peter to his house (10:1–23)
Jesus raises widow's son from death (7:11–17)	Peter raises widow from death (9:36–43)
Missionary journey to gentiles (10:1–12)	Missionary journeys to gentiles (13:1–19:20)
Jesus travels to Jerusalem (9:51–19:28)	Paul travels to Jerusalem (19:21–21:17)
Jesus is received favorably (19:37)	Paul is received favorably (21:17–20)
Jesus is devoted to the temple (19:45–48)	Paul is devoted to the temple (21:26)
Sadducees oppose Jesus, but scribes support him (20:27–39)	Sadducees oppose Paul, but Pharisees support him (23:6–9)
Jesus breaks bread and gives thanks (22:19)	Paul breaks bread and gives thanks (27:35)
Jesus is seized by an angry mob (22:54)	Paul is seized by an angry mob (21:30)
Jesus is slapped by high priest's aides (22:63–64)	Paul is slapped at high priest's command (23:2)
Jesus is tried four times and declared innocent three times (22:66–23:13)	Paul is tried four times and declared innocent three times (23:1–26:32)
Jesus is rejected by the Jews (23:18)	Paul is rejected by the Jews (21:36)
Jesus is regarded favorably by a centurion (23:47)	Paul is regarded favorably by a centurion (27:43)
Final confirmation that Scriptures have been fulfilled (24:45–47)	Final confirmation that Scriptures have been fulfilled (28:23–28)

8.16

Gabriel the Angel

Gabriel is best known today for his New Testament appearances in the Gospel of Luke.

- He appears to Zechariah the priest in the temple to announce the birth of his son, the future John the Baptist (Luke 1:11–20).
- He appears to Mary the virgin in Nazareth to announce the birth of her son, the future Jesus Christ (Luke 1:26–38).

Gabriel would already have been well known to most of Luke's readers, because of his role in the Old Testament book of Daniel.

- He comes in human form to explain the significance of a vision Daniel has had (Dan. 8:15–26).
- He comes again to give Daniel special wisdom and understanding (Dan. 9:21–27).

In all of these cases, Gabriel functions primarily as a messenger from God. In 1 Enoch, a nonbiblical Jewish writing, Gabriel is assigned many duties.

- He is one of the “glorious ones” who watch over humanity (1 Enoch 40:3–10).

- He is one of four select angels who bring the prayers of martyrs to God's attention (1 Enoch 9:1–11).
- He is the angel who will cast the wicked into the fiery furnace at the Last Judgment.

Notably, in 1 Enoch and similar writings, Gabriel is typically referred to as an "archangel," though in the Bible that term is applied only to Michael (Jude 9).

In church tradition, Gabriel came to be identified as the angel or archangel whose trumpet blast will announce the return of Christ (Matt. 24:31; 1 Thess. 4:16). In Islam, Gabriel is identified as the angel who dictated the Koran to Mohamed.

8.17

The Twelve Disciples

All four Gospels indicate that Jesus had twelve disciples who had a privileged status among his many followers. Their names are given in three of the Gospels and in Acts, as indicated in this chart.

New Testament Lists of the Twelve Disciples

Matthew 10:2–4	Mark 3:16–19	Luke 6:13–16	Acts 1:13–14
Simon Peter	Simon Peter	Simon Peter	Peter
Andrew	James of Zebedee	Andrew	John
James of Zebedee	John of Zebedee	James	James
John of Zebedee	Andrew	John	Andrew
Philip	Philip	Philip	Philip
Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Thomas
Thomas	Matthew	Matthew	Bartholomew
Matthew	Thomas	Thomas	Matthew
James of Alphaeus	James of Alphaeus	James of Alphaeus	James of Alphaeus
Thaddaeus	Thaddaeus	Simon the Zealot	Simon the Zealot
Simon the Cananean	Simon the Cananean	Judas of James	Judas of James
Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot	(Judas Iscariot) (Matthias, cf. 1:26)

Eleven names appear on all four lists, but whereas Matthew and Mark list a disciple named Thaddaeus who is not found on the lists in Luke or Acts, the latter two books list a disciple named “Judas of James” (which could mean “son of James” or “brother of James”) who is not mentioned in Matthew or Mark.

Church tradition resolved this discrepancy by declaring Thaddaeus and Judas to be the same person, offering the not unreasonable

suggestion that this disciple went by the name Thaddaeus to avoid confusion with another disciple named Judas who was among the twelve. Modern scholars allow that this could have been the case but also note the possibility that changes in the personnel of the twelve might have been made at different times (so Thaddaeus could have among the twelve at one point and Judas of James at another point).

Interpreters also note the slight difference in the order in which the disciples are named, though there is a high degree of consistency in the various orderings. Notably, Peter is always listed first, and Judas Iscariot is always listed last.

The matter is complicated somewhat through consideration of John's Gospel, which mentions "the twelve" (6:67, 70–71; 20:24) but never provides a list. If one scours the entire book, the names of some of the twelve familiar from the Synoptics do appear: Andrew (1:40); Peter (1:42), Philip (1:44), Judas Iscariot (6:71), another Judas (14:22), Thomas (20:24–25), and "the sons of Zebedee" (21:2). But this would account for only eight of the twelve. John's Gospel does not mention Bartholomew, Matthew, James of Alphaeus, or Simon the Zealot. And it seems to speak of someone named Nathanael as though he is among the twelve (1:45–49; 21:2).

At some point in church history, ecclesiastic authorities sought to resolve the confusion by simply declaring (without any evidence) that Nathanael is the same person identified as Bartholomew in the other Gospels. That has seemed satisfactory to many Bible readers,

especially since would otherwise be known of Bartholomew and there would be no biblical stories of his exploits to read on August 24, the day assigned to him in the liturgical church year. Scholars are a harder sell and tend to regard the Bartholomew = Nathanael equation as a somewhat facetious attempt at harmonization. Maybe Nathanael was simply a friend of the disciples or, again, maybe the precise membership of “the twelve” changed over time.

Whatever the exact names of these disciples might have been, all four Gospels hold that the concept of “the twelve” is significant. This is no doubt because the number recalls the twelve tribes of Israel and so Jesus’s designation of a group of followers as “the twelve” was probably intended to symbolize the restoration of Israel that he hoped to effect. Indeed, Jesus is portrayed as promising his disciples that they will judge the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:30).

The significance of the number twelve is also evident in the story reported in Acts 1:15–26, where the early church feels a need to replace Judas Iscariot by selecting Matthias to fill out their number. This process does not continue, however: when James the son of Zebedee is killed (Acts 12:2), no effort is made to replace him. The apostle Paul knew about “the twelve” and, at least two decades before the Gospels were written, he referred to that entity as a group that could authenticate the church’s proclamation of Jesus’s resurrection (1 Cor. 15:5).

8.18

Zacchaeus

Zacchaeus was a wealthy tax collector in Jericho whose story is recounted in Luke 19:1–10 (he is mentioned nowhere else in the Bible).

When Jesus passes through the town, Zacchaeus wants to see who he is but isn't able to, because of the crowd and because he is short of stature. He climbs a tree for a better view. Surprisingly, Jesus summons him to come down and goes to his home, presumably for a meal. This prompts a negative response from the crowd, who grumble that Jesus has “gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner” (Luke 19:7).

Zacchaeus offers a comment to Jesus that is somewhat ambiguous: “half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I pay back four times as much.” Some interpreters assume Zacchaeus is defending himself against the charge that he is a sinner by stating what has always been his normal (and righteous) policy. Others think the context implies a transformation: Zacchaeus is stating what he is going to do from this point on.

The NRSV opts for the latter interpretation and translates the present-tense verbs (“I give to the poor”; “I pay back”) as future expressions (“I will give to the poor”; “I will pay back”). This is

grammatically possible since, in Greek, the present tense can be used idiomatically to express inception of future action. The notion that Zacchaeus has undergone a transformation may also be suggested by Jesus's concluding comment: "Today, salvation has come to this house" (19:9), though the rationale stated for that salvation is not that Zacchaeus has repented but that he "is a son of Abraham."

The story is definitely intended to illustrate Jesus's vocation as one who has come "to seek out and to save the lost" (19:10). The interpretive question is whether Zacchaeus was "lost" because he was a sinner needing repentance, or because he had been mislabeled a sinner and needed to be identified as a true son of Abraham.

8.19

Jesus as Messiah, Lord, and Savior

The question of Jesus's identity is raised repeatedly in Luke's Gospel.

Scribes: "Who is this who is speaking blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (5:21)

Table guests: "Who is this who even forgives sins?" (7:49)

Disciples: "Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?" (8:25)

Herod: "Who is this about whom I hear such things?" (9:9)

Luke's Gospel story provides three primary answers to this question: Messiah, Lord, and Savior.

Jesus Is the Messiah—from Birth

Luke 9:18–20

Jesus asks: "Who do the crowds say that I am?" Answers are given:

John the Baptist, Elijah, one of the prophets.

Then Jesus asks, "Who do you say that I am?"

Peter answers, "You are the Messiah of God."

But Luke also makes a point that the other Gospels do not: Jesus is the Messiah from the time that he is born.

Luke 2:25–32

The prophet Simeon has been told he will not die until he sees the Messiah. When the infant Jesus is brought to him, he declares that he may now die in peace, for the word has been fulfilled: even as an infant, Jesus is the Messiah.

Jesus Is the Lord—from Birth

Luke 20:41–44

Jesus stymies the religious leaders with a riddle: If the Messiah is the “son of David,” why does David call him “Lord”? Jesus is Messiah, but not *only* Messiah—he is also Lord.

In the book of Acts, we learn what this means: Jesus is not simply the Jewish Messiah (Christ), he is also Lord for all people (Acts 2:21, 36)—and because he is Lord, Christians pray to him, as they would to God (7:59; cf. Luke 23:46).

But Luke also makes a point that the other Gospels do not: Jesus is the Lord from the time that he is born (even before).

Luke 1:43

Mary, while she is pregnant with Jesus, visits her relative Elizabeth. Filled with the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth exclaims, “And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord has come to me?” Jesus, not even born yet, is already identified as Lord.

Jesus Is the Savior—from Birth

Luke's Gospel is the only one of the Synoptic Gospels to call Jesus "Savior" and to identify the very purpose of his earthly life as being to bring salvation.

Luke 19:10

Jesus tells Zacchaeus that he has come "to seek and to save the lost." Jesus does not just become Savior at the end of his life when he dies on the cross; he is already bringing salvation to people during his earthly ministry.

Indeed, Luke makes a point here that no other Gospel makes: Jesus is Savior from the time that he is born.

Luke 2:30

The prophet Simeon looks on the infant Jesus and declares that he has seen the salvation that God has prepared in the presence of all peoples. Thus Jesus is identified as the one who brings God's salvation while he is just a baby.

Compare this to Matthew's Gospel. There, the angel who announces Jesus's birth says that he *will* save his people from their sins, meaning that he will become Savior at the end of his life when he dies on the cross to bring people salvation from sin and death. Luke believes that there are many things other than sin and death from which people need to be saved (demonic influences, disease, hunger, poverty, ostracism, attachment to wealth, etc.), and he relates how Jesus saves people from these things during his life on earth. Thus Jesus is to be identified as Savior from birth.

Here is one verse that expresses Luke's understanding of Jesus:

Luke 2:11

"To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah,
the Lord."

Messiah—born this day

Lord—born this day

Savior—born this day

Jesus is Messiah, Lord, and Savior—from birth.

8.20

Jesus as the Promised One

Luke wants to identify Jesus as the one who fulfills the expectations of Jewish faith based on many different passages in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Messiah: The psalms and other writings speak of a promised Messiah or ideal king who will restore the fortunes of Israel (e.g., Ps. 89; cf. 2 Sam. 7:5–16). According to Luke, this is Jesus (9:20).

Son of Man: The book of Daniel describes the coming of a heavenly figure called the “Son of Man” (Dan. 7:13–14 [NRSV: human being]). Again, Luke says that this is Jesus (22:69; cf. Acts 7:56).

Prophet Like Moses: The book of Deuteronomy records a promise that God will raise up a prophet like Moses (Deut. 18:15). Luke’s Gospel identifies Jesus as the one God has sent to lead a new exodus (9:31 [NRSV: departure]), and the book of Acts explicitly identifies Jesus as the prophet like Moses promised in Deuteronomy (Acts 3:22; 7:37).

Servant of the Lord: The prophet Isaiah speaks of a suffering Servant of the Lord, through whom God will establish justice (Isa. 42:1–4; 49:1–6; 50:4–11; 52:13–53:12). Luke identifies this figure with Jesus (22:37, referring to Isa. 53:12; cf. Acts 8:30–35).

Returned Elijah: The book of Malachi predicts that the prophet Elijah will return before the day of the Lord (Mal. 4:5). Luke does

not explicitly identify Jesus as the returned Elijah, but he omits a story from Mark's Gospel that identifies John the Baptist as that figure (Mark 9:11–13), and he adds two stories that present Jesus doing things that Elijah was famous for doing: raising a widow's son (7:11–17; cf. 1 Kings 17:17–24) and ascending into heaven (24:50–51; cf. 2 Kings 2:9–12).

Jesus Is All of These—and More

Most readers of the Jewish Scriptures traditionally had assumed that these various figures were different individuals, not one person. The focusing of all of these traditions onto a single individual appears to have been an innovation of the Christian faith. Luke himself was not the prime innovator, but his writings offer what may be the best example of such a comprehensive approach to Christology. Jesus fulfills things written in *all* of the Scriptures (24:27; cf. 24:44).

8.21

Jesus as Son and Servant in Luke

Jesus Is the Son of God in Luke

The angel tells Mary that her child “will be called holy—the Son of God” (1:35 ESV).

God speaks from heaven at Jesus’s baptism, addressing Jesus as “Son” (3:22).

God speaks from heaven at Jesus’s transfiguration, identifying Jesus as “Son” (9:35).

The high priest asks Jesus, “Are you, then, the Son of God?” and Jesus responds, “You say that I am” (22:70).

In the Gospel of Luke, the title “Son of God” emphasizes Jesus’s uniqueness and oneness with God, but in this Gospel the essential ingredient of divine sonship seems to be Jesus’s absolute obedience to the will of his Father.

Satan tempts Jesus as the Son of God, but Jesus refuses to go against God’s will (4:1–13).

Luke replaces the “cry of dereliction” (“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”) in Mark’s Gospel (15:34) with this: “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit” (23:46).

Jesus as Son and Servant

Jesus, the obedient *pais* (2:43), says, “I must be in my Father’s house” (2:49). The Greek word *pais* used in this passage can mean either “son” or “servant.” English Bibles regularly translate the term as “son,” but the ambiguity in Greek may be intentional (2:49).

Jesus describes his mission as the fulfillment of Isaianic prophecy: he has been anointed with the Spirit to do what Isaiah says the “Servant of the Lord” will do (4:16–22; cf. Isa. 61:2). People respond by wondering if he is the “son of Joseph.” Of course, the reader knows that he is only “the son (as was thought) of Joseph” (3:23), and that actually he is the Son of God (1:35).

8.22

Pagan Images for Jesus in the Gospel of Luke

Unlike the other Gospels, Luke seems to draw on a number of images from the pagan world to help his Roman readers understand who Jesus is.

Philosopher: Biographies of Greek or Roman philosophers often portrayed a wandering teacher instructing disciples on a journey, in a manner similar to the “journey to Jerusalem” motif that dominates Luke’s Gospel (see 9:51–19:40). Also, the latter half of such a biography often was about the school that continued the philosopher’s work after his death; when Luke-Acts is viewed as a single work, it resembles these books about philosophers and their students.

Benefactor: In Roman society, important public figures sometimes were proclaimed to be benefactors whose existence was a blessing to society. The decrees that bestowed such status on them emphasized matters of merit that Luke’s Gospel attributes to Jesus: congruence of word and deed (24:19; cf. Acts 1:1); bestowal of peace (1:79; 2:14, 29); granting clemency to enemies (23:34; 24:47); endurance of hardships and trials (22:28). In Luke 22:25, Jesus criticizes the so-called benefactors of the Roman world, but in Acts 10:38, Jesus is explicitly identified as one who “went about as a benefactor himself” (NRSV: “went about doing good”).

Immortal: Greek and Roman mythology contains stories of immortals, who are the offspring of male gods and human women (e.g., Dionysius, Hercules). Such characters have both human and divine attributes: they are able to perform remarkable deeds while on earth, but eventually they ascend to Mount Olympus to live with the gods; there, they retain an interest in human affairs and sometimes intervene on behalf of those who seek their aid. Luke's story presents Jesus as the offspring of some kind of encounter between the Jewish God and a human woman (1:35) and, likewise, presents him as ascending into heaven, where (in the book of Acts) he continues to intervene on behalf of humans (e.g., see Acts 9:1–9, where he confronts the man persecuting his followers).

Of course, Luke believes that Jesus is more than just a philosopher or benefactor, and he is quite clear that Jesus's divine origin does not involve any sexual relationship between God and Mary (in mythology, the immortals come into being when gods mate with women out of lust). Still, people familiar with the Hellenistic literature of the Greco-Roman world probably would have recognized some contact points that enabled them to connect Luke's story of Jesus with things they already knew: they might recognize that Luke's Jesus is something like a philosopher or a benefactor, or one of the immortals from mythology. Thus Luke seems inclined to provide his readers with a variety of entry points for obtaining a partial (if ultimately inadequate) understanding of who Jesus is.

8.23

The Journey Motif in Luke

Luke 9:51–19:40 relates the journey of Jesus to Jerusalem. The reader is reminded repeatedly throughout this section that Jesus is “traveling” or “going up” or “on his way” to Jerusalem.

This section contains the bulk of the material in Luke that does not derive from Mark (according to dominant source theories). Other large non-Markan blocks in Luke include the infancy narrative (1–2), the Sermon on the Plain (6:17–49), and the resurrection appearances (24). But the journey is by far the largest such block in Luke’s Gospel.

The journey functions as a *literary device* that Luke has used to structure his material. Its significance must be evaluated from literary and theological perspectives. It does not always make sense when considered in terms of historical or geographical realities.

We might consider two oft-quoted remarks from veteran Lukan scholars:

Jesus is traveling to Jerusalem all the time, but he never makes any progress.

—Karl Schmidt

At times, Jesus seems to be in the vicinity of Jerusalem, and then suddenly he seems to be farther away. For example, in 13:31, after four chapters of traveling, he is back in Galilee again.

Jesus's route cannot be reconstructed on the map and, in any case, Luke did not possess one.

—Hans Conzelmann

Luke does not seem to have an exact picture of Palestinian geography. For example, he has Jesus pass directly from Galilee into Judea without going through Samaria (17:11).

The *literary effect* of the journey on Luke's Gospel is that it introduces a major new section of the story. Mark's Gospel consisted basically of two parts: the ministry of Jesus (in Galilee) and the passion of Jesus (in Jerusalem). Luke has added a new section, the journey of Jesus (from Galilee to Jerusalem), which is just as important as his ministry and his passion.

The *emphasis* of the material in the journey section is on the teaching of Jesus. Thus the reader of Luke's Gospel perceives that Jesus's teaching is just as important as his earthly ministry and his passion.

There is precedence for the journey motif:

- The book of Deuteronomy presents the teaching of Moses to the Israelites just before they enter the promised land.

- Isaiah 40–55 presents the teaching of the prophet to the exiles just before they return to Jerusalem.

In an analogous fashion, Luke 9:51–19:40 presents the teaching of Jesus just before he enters Jerusalem to die. Compare also in Acts the journeys of Paul to Jerusalem, where he will be arrested, and to Rome, where he will die.

The theological effect of the journey motif is to place the bulk of Jesus’s teachings under the “shadow of the cross.” Material that would not in itself be interpreted in this way is now read in light of the impending passion, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus—the “departure” that he is said to accomplish in Jerusalem at the journey’s end (Luke 9:31).

8.24

The Centrality of Jerusalem in Luke-Acts (Box 10.5)

Gospel of Luke

- The story opens in Jerusalem (in the temple) (1:5–8).
- Jesus is brought to Jerusalem as a baby (2:22–38).
- Jesus is in Jerusalem at the age of twelve (2:41–50).
- There is a ten-chapter journey to Jerusalem (9:51–19:40; see especially 9:51, 53; 13:22; 17:11; 18:31; 19:11, 28).
- Jesus weeps over Jerusalem (19:41–44; also 13:33–35).
- Resurrection appearances occur in and around Jerusalem (24:13, 18, 33, 41–43).
- The mission to all nations begins with Jerusalem (24:47).
- Jesus tells disciples to stay in Jerusalem (24:49).
- The story closes in Jerusalem (in the temple) (24:52–53).

See also 5:17; 6:17; 9:31; 10:30; 13:4; 21:20, 24; 23:28.

Book of Acts

- Jesus orders his disciples not to leave Jerusalem (1:4).
- The mission to the ends of the earth begins in Jerusalem (1:8).

- Believers gather for prayer and planning in Jerusalem (1:12–26).
- The Holy Spirit comes to 120 believers in Jerusalem (2:1–4).
- Peter preaches to residents of Jerusalem, and three thousand are saved (2:5–41).
- The Jerusalem church is an ideal community (2:42–47; also 4:32–37).
- There are five chapters on the church in Jerusalem (3:1–8:1; see especially 4:5, 16; 5:16, 28; 6:7).
- The Samaritan mission receives the endorsement of the Jerusalem church (8:14–25).
- Paul's newfound devotion to Christ is recognized by the Jerusalem church (9:27–30).
- Peter reports to Jerusalem concerning the baptism of gentiles (11:1–18).
- The Jerusalem church sends Barnabas to check on the gentile mission in Antioch (11:19–26).
- Antioch Christians fund relief ministry for Jerusalem (11:27–30; also 12:25).
- The council in Jerusalem decides on the controversy over gentile conversions (15:1–29).
- Paul promulgates the decision of the Jerusalem council (16:4).

- Paul reports back to Jerusalem after the second missionary journey (18:22).
- Paul reports back to Jerusalem after the third missionary journey (21:17).
- Paul is arrested and put on trial in Jerusalem (21:27–23:11).

See also 8:27; 9:2, 13, 21; 10:39; 13:13, 27, 31; 19:21; 20:16, 22;
21:4–13; 25:1, 3, 7, 9, 15, 20, 24; 26:4, 10, 20; 28:17.

8.25

Jesus's Example of Frequent, Fervent Prayer

(Comments from Eusebius)

Scholars often note that Luke's Gospel emphasizes Jesus's habit of praying frequently and fervently.

3:21	"Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened."
5:16	"But he would withdraw to deserted places and pray."
6:12	"Now during those days he went out to the mountain to pray; and he spent the night in prayer to God."
9:18	"Once when Jesus was praying alone, with only the disciples near him, he asked them, 'Who do the crowds say that I am?'"
9:28	"Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray."
9:29	"And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white."
11:1	"He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.'"
22:40	"When he reached the place, he said to them, 'Pray that you may not come into the time of trial.'"
22:41	"Then he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed."

The early church historian Eusebius of Caesarea (263–339) drew on Luke and other Gospels in his comments on Jesus's habit of prayer:

Jesus prayed and did not pray in vain, since he received what he asked for in prayer when he might have done so without prayer.

If so, who among us would neglect to pray?

Mark says that “in the morning, a great while before day, he rose and went out to a lonely place, and there he prayed” (Mark 1:35).

And Luke says, “He was praying in a certain place, and when he ceased, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray’” (Luke 11:1).

And elsewhere, “And all night he continued in prayer to God” (Luke 6:12).

And John records his prayer, saying, “When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, ‘Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you’” (John 17:1).

The same Evangelist writes that the Lord said that he knew “you hear me always” (John 11:42).

All this shows that the one who prays always is always heard.

On Prayer 13.1

8.26

Luke 3:2–3—Purpose of John’s Baptism (Church Tradition)

The Gospels of Mark and Luke both say that John the Baptist proclaimed a “baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” Notably, the author of Matthew’s Gospel rewords this, to indicate only that people confessed their sins when John baptized them.

Mark 1:4	Luke 3:2–3	Matthew 3:1, 5–6
“John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”	“The word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”	“In those days John the Baptizer appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, ‘Repent for the kingdom of heaven has come near’ . . . Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.”

Perhaps the author of Matthew was uncomfortable with attributing to John’s baptism something that he believed only Christian baptism as authorized by Jesus could accomplish.

All three Synoptic Gospels also indicate that he baptizes people with water while the one who is coming after him will baptize people with the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:8) or, indeed, with the Holy Spirit and fire (Matt. 3:11; Luke 3:16).

One story in the book of Acts also attempts to distinguish between the effects of these different baptisms:

Paul passed through the interior regions and came to Ephesus, where he found some disciples. He said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?” They replied, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” Then he said, “Into what then were you baptized?” They answered, “Into John’s baptism.” Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus.” On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.” (Acts 19:1–4)

Some writers in the first few centuries of church history also tried to sort this matter out. Here are the views of two prominent leaders in the Eastern Church, both of whom served (successively) as Archbishop of Constantinople.

Gregory Nazianzen (ca. 329–390):

Let us here treat briefly of the different kinds of baptism.

Moses baptized, but in water, in the cloud and in the sea; but this he did figuratively. [see 1 Cor. 10:1–2]

John also baptized, not indeed in the rite of the Jews, not solely in water, but also for the remission of sins; yet not in an entirely spiritual manner, for he had not added: “in the spirit.”

Jesus baptized, but in the Spirit; and this is perfection.

There is also a fourth baptism, which is wrought by martyrdom and blood, in which Christ himself was also baptized, which is far more venerable than the others, in as much as it is not soiled by repeated contagion. [see Mark 10:38–39; Luke 12:50]

There is yet a fifth, but more laborious, by tears; with which David each night bedewed his bed, washing his couch with tears [see Ps. 6:6].

*Oration 39*¹

John Chrysostom (ca. 349–407):

Since the Victim [Jesus] had not been offered, nor had the Holy Spirit yet descended, of what kind was this remission of sins? . . . When he said that he came “preaching the baptism of repentance,” he adds, “for the remission of sins”; as if to say: he persuaded them to repent of their sins, so that later they might more easily receive pardon through believing in Christ. For unless brought to it by repentance, they would not seek for pardon. His baptism therefore served no other end than as a preparation for belief in Christ.

The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 10.2²

1. M. F. Toal, trans. and ed., *The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers: A Manual of Preaching, Spiritual Reading, and Meditation*, 4 vols. (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1958), 1:74–75. 2. Toal, *The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers*, 1:74–75.

8.27

Luke 3:21–22—Why a Dove? (Church Tradition)

The Synoptic Gospels all report that the Spirit of God descended on Jesus like a dove at his baptism.

Matthew 3:16	Mark 1:10	Luke 3:21–22
“And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him.”	“And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him.”	“Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove.”

Many writers in the early church would wonder about the significance of the dove. Perhaps it is because doves are symbols of innocence (cf. Matt. 10:16) or purity or peace, or maybe it has something to do with Noah, who was brought an olive branch by a dove to let him know the flood was over (Gen. 8:8–11). But Ambrose wanted to make clear that it wasn't a *real* dove (see below)!

Gregory Thaumaturgus (213–270):

God opened the gates of the heavens and sent down the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, lighting upon the head of Jesus, pointing him out right there as the new Noah, even the maker of Noah, and the good pilot of the nature [that is, of humanity] which is in shipwreck. (*The Fourth Homily, On the Holy Theophany, or Christ's Baptism*)¹

Origen (185–ca. 254):

A dove—a tame, innocent and simple bird. Hence we are taught to copy the innocence of doves.

Tertullian (ca. 160–ca. 220):

The Holy Spirit came in the form of a dove in order that the nature of the Holy Spirit might be made plain by means of a creature of utter simplicity and innocence. For the dove's body has no gall in it. So after the deluge, by which the iniquity of the old world was purged away, after, so to speak, the baptism of the world, the dove as herald proclaimed to the earth the tempering of the wrath of heaven—sent forth from the ark and returning with an olive branch, which is a sigh of peace among the nations.

(*On Baptism* 8)²

John Chrysostom (ca. 349–407):

But why in the form of a dove? The dove is a gentle and pure creature. Since then the Spirit, too, is “a Spirit of gentleness,” he appears in the form of a dove, reminding us of Noah, to whom, when once a common disaster had overtaken the whole world and humanity was in danger of perishing, the dove appeared as a sign of deliverance from the tempest, and bearing an olive branch, published the good tidings of a serene presence over the whole world. All these things were given as a type of things to come. . . . In this case the dove also appeared, not bearing an olive branch, but pointing to our Deliverer from all evils, bringing hope filled with grace. For this dove does not simply lead one

family out of an ark, but the whole world toward heaven at her appearing. And instead of a branch of peace from an olive tree, she conveys the possibility of adoption for all the world's offspring in common. (*The Gospel of Matthew* 12.3)³

The Venerable Bede (672–735):

The image of a dove is placed before us by God so that we may learn the simplicity favored by him. So let us meditate on the nature of the dove, that from each one of its features of innocence we may learn the principles of a more becoming life. The dove is a stranger to malice. So may all bitterness, anger and indignation be taken away from us, together with all malice. The dove injures nothing with its mouth or talons, nor does it nourish itself or its young on tiny mice or grubs, as do almost all smaller birds. Let us see that our teeth are not weapons and arrows.⁴

Ambrose (347–397):

The Holy Spirit descended as a dove. Not “a dove descended,” but “as a dove.” (*The Sacraments* 1.6)

1. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 10 vols. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1885–96), 6:70–71.
2. H. D. Smith, ed., *Ante-Nicene Exegesis of the Gospels*, 6 vols. (London: SPCK, 1925) 1:304.
3. P. Schaaf et al., eds., *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 2nd series, 14 vols. (New York: Christian Literature, 1887–94), 10:77.

4. The Venerable Bede. *Homilies on the Gospels*, trans. L. T. Martin and D. Hurst
(Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1990), 1.12.

8.28

Luke 3:22—Quoting God: Why the Gospels Differ

One of the only times that God speaks directly in the New Testament may be found in the stories of Jesus’s baptism. But what God says in Matthew differs slightly from what God says in the other two Synoptic Gospels.

Matthew 3:17	Mark 1:11	Luke 3:22
And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”	And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with* you I am well pleased.”	And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with* you I am well pleased.”

Though the English is the same in both Mark and Luke in the NRSV, the Greek uses different prepositions: a more literal translation might read “with you” in Mark and “in you” in Luke.

The more significant difference, however, is that in Matthew, *God speaks about Jesus in the third person*, apparently informing John and others gathered as to the identity of the one who had just been baptized. In Mark and in Luke, *God speaks to Jesus in the second person*, informing him of his identity—or confirming that identity.

Scholars have tried to interpret these modes of divine revelation (*about* Jesus or *to* Jesus) in light of the Gospels’ christological understandings.

Augustine (354–430)

The Bishop of Hippo rightly discerned that Bible readers might be troubled by this apparent discrepancy. One would think that, if ever there were a time for precision, it would be in citing the words of God spoken directly from heaven. But the bishop assured readers that such precision is unnecessary because the verses all mean the same thing:

Whichever of the Evangelists may have preserved for us the words as they were literally uttered by the heavenly voice, the others have varied the terms only with the object of setting forth the same sense more familiarly, so that what is thus given by all of them might be understood as if the expressions were: "In You I have set me good pleasure," that is to say, "by You I am doing what is my pleasure."

So, the second-person account is to be preferred. And all three of the evangelists might have done better to say "by you" rather than "with whom," "with you," or even "in you."¹

Did God Speak Greek?

Augustine leaves unanswered the question of what language God actually spoke. If it were Greek (the language in which all three Synoptic record the saying) it is unlikely that John, Jesus himself, or any of the bystanders would have understood. If God spoke in Hebrew or in Aramaic, then the issue becomes one of variant translations.

1. P. Schaaf et al., eds., *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 2nd series, 14 vols. (New York: Christian Literature, 1887–94), 6:119–20.

8.29

Luke 4:1–13—Temptation of Jesus and of Adam and Eve

The Gospels of Matthew and Luke record the story of Jesus’s temptation by Satan in the wilderness—their versions are quite similar, though their orders of temptations differ.

Matthew 4:1–11	Luke 4:1–13
<p>Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. 3 The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” 4 But he answered, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”</p> <p>5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, 6 saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’” 7 Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”</p> <p>8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; 9 and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” 10 Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! for it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’” 11 Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.</p>	<p>Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, 2 where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. 3 The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.” 4 Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’”</p> <p>5 Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. 6 And the devil said to him, “To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. 7 If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” 8 Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’”</p> <p>9 Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, 10 for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,’ 11 and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’” 12 Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” 13 When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.</p>

The apostle Paul may or may not have known this story, but he does liken Jesus to a second Adam (1 Cor. 15:45–49). Adam and his wife Eve were famously tempted by a serpent in Genesis 3:1–13:

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?’” The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.’” But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, “Where are you?” He said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.” He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you

eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate." Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent tricked me, and I ate."

Perhaps this is what inspired a popular interpretation of the story offered by Gregory the Great (ca. 540–604). Also known as Saint Gregory and as Pope Gregory I, this church leader (for whom Gregorian chants would be named) explained how the temptations of Jesus corresponded to those of Adam (and Eve):

The Ancient Enemy raised himself in three temptations against our first parents, for then he tempted them with gluttony, vainglory, and avarice. And in tempting, he was triumphant, for he made them subject to him through their consent.

Indeed, he tempted them with gluttony, when he showed them the food of the forbidden tree and persuaded them to eat. He tempted them with vainglory when he said, "you shall be as Gods". And having made progress to this point he tempted them through avarice when he spoke of "knowing good and evil." For avarice has as its object not only money, but loftiness of estate.

But in the same way that he [Satan] overcame the first man, he lay subdued before the Second.

He tempted him also with gluttony when he said, "Command that these stones be made bread." He tempted him with vainglory when he said, "If thou be the Son of God cast thyself down." And

with avarice for loftiness and power, he tempted him when he showed him all the world, saying, “All these things will I give thee if falling down thou wilt adore me.” (*Forty Gospel Homilies* 16.2–3)¹

For centuries, Gregory’s interpretation would be standard fodder for preaching; for example, it is quoted verbatim in the work of Peter Lombard (ca. 1096–1160), a scholastic theologian and Bishop of Paris (see his *Sententiae* 2.21.5).

Some exegetes, however, have found the analogy strained. John Calvin (1509–64) said that it was “ridiculous” to equate *gluttony* with the desire for a hungry man to eat bread: “What kind of high living is there in bread?” he asks. “Is it not ridiculous to speak of an immoderate display of gluttony in the case of a hungry man seeking food to satisfy his nature?” (*Harmony of the Gospels* 1.134–137)²

But by then, Gregory’s reading of the story had already inspired a thousand years of sermons.

1. Cited in David Lyle Jeffrey, ed., *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 753–54.

2. John Calvin, *A Harmony of the Gospels*, vol. 1, trans. A. W. Morrison (1972; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 137.

8.30

Luke 7:28—The Greatest Man Who Ever Lived?

The Gospels of Matthew and Luke record Jesus as indicating that John the Baptist may have been the greatest man who had ever lived—with one caveat.

Matthew 11:11	Luke 7:28
“Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”	“I tell you, among those born of women no one is greater than John; yet the least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.”

Cyril of Jerusalem (313–386), a theologian of the early church, emphasizes the point:

Even though Elijah the Tishbite was taken up to heaven, he was not greater than John. [See 2 Kings 2:11.]

Enoch too was translated but was not greater than John. [See Gen. 5:24.]

Moses was the greatest of lawgivers and all the prophets were admirable, but none greater than John.

It is not I who would dare to compare prophet with prophet, but their Master and ours who himself declared, “Among those born of women, there is none greater than John.”

But then Cyril adds this note: “Observe! Not ‘born of *virgins*,’ but ‘born of *women*!’”¹

So, for Cyril of Jerusalem, John the Baptist can be regarded only as the “second greatest man who ever lived.” Jesus was not born of a woman (but see Gal. 4:4!) but of a virgin, and that makes all the difference. To follow the logic, we must assume that, for Cyril, a “virgin” was not yet a “woman.”

Other New Testament interpreters would note that John’s pre-eminence endures only up to the advent of the kingdom of heaven.

The *least* in the kingdom are greater than him and so, obviously, the *greatest* in the kingdom—children and the childlike (Matt. 18:4), servants and slaves (Matt. 20:26–27)—must be greater still.

1. J. Ballie et al., eds., *Library of Christian Classics*, 26 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953–66), 4:93–94.

8.31

Luke 13:18–19—Why a Mustard Seed?

(Comments from Church Tradition)

In all three Synoptic Gospels, Jesus tells a parable about a mustard seed.

Matthew 13:31–32	Mark 4:30–32	Luke 13:18–19
<p>He put before them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.”</p>	<p>He also said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”</p>	<p>He said therefore, “What is the kingdom of God like? And to what should I compare it? It is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in the garden; it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches.”</p>

Most interpreters have assumed Jesus chose a mustard seed for this illustration because of the obvious difference between the size of the seed (about the size of a grain of salt) and the mature plant (a shrub the size of a small tree). He might have made a similar point in modern America with an acorn and an oak tree.

From the early church, on, however, some interpreters have tried to find something specific about “mustard” to extract additional meaning from the saying. Further, the mere fact that a seed is buried before it produces growth suggested imagery of death and resurrection, either of Jesus’s followers or of Jesus himself.

Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–ca. 250):

The word which proclaims the kingdom of heaven is sharp and pungent as mustard. It represses bile (anger) and checks inflammation (pride). From this word flows the soul's true vitality and fitness for eternity. To such increased size did the growth of the word come that the tree which sprang from it (that is the Church of Christ now being established over the whole earth) filled the world, so that the birds of the air (that is, holy angels and lofty souls) dwelt in its branches. (*Fragments from the Catena of Nicetas, Bishop of Heraclea* 4)¹

Ambrose (347–397):

Its seed is indeed very plain, and of little value; but if bruised or crushed it shows forth its power. So faith first seems a simple thing; but if it is bruised by its enemies it gives forth proof of its power, so as to fill others who hear or read of it with the odor of its sweetness. Our martyrs, Felix, Nabor and Victor, possessed the sweet odor of faith; but they dwelt in "obscurity. When the persecution came, they laid down their arms, and bowed their necks, and being stricken by the sword they diffused to all the ends of the earth the grace of their martyrdom. . . . The Lord himself is the grain of mustard seed. He was without injury; but the people were unaware of him as a grain of mustard seed of which they took no notice. He chose to be bruised, that we might say: "For we are the good odor of Christ unto God." ("Sermon on 'The Grain of the Mustard Seed'")²

Also, “seed” can have sexual connotations, but would that be pressing the analogy too far? To speak of Jesus impregnating his bride, the Church? Let’s see.

Peter Chrysologus (406–450):

Yes, it is true: a mustard seed is indeed an image of the kingdom of God. Christ is the kingdom of heaven. Sown like a mustard seed in the garden of the virgin’s womb, he grew up into the tree of the cross whose branches stretch across the world. Crushed in the mortar of the passion, its fruit has produced seasoning enough for the flavoring and preservation of every living creature with which it comes in contact. As long as a mustard seed remains intact, its properties lie dormant; but when it is crushed they are exceedingly evident. So it was with Christ; he chose to have his body crushed, because he would not have his power concealed. . . . The man Christ received the mustard seed which represents the kingdom of God; as man he received it, though as God he had always possessed it. He sowed it in his garden, that is in his bride, the Church. The Church is a garden extending over the whole world, tilled by the plough of the gospel, fenced in by stakes of doctrine and discipline, cleared of every harmful weed by the labor of the apostles, fragrant and lovely with perennial flowers: virgins’ lilies and martyrs’ roses set amid the pleasant verdure of all who bear witness to Christ and the tender plants of all who have faith in him. Such then is the mustard seed which Christ “sowed in his garden. When he promised a kingdom to the patriarchs, the seed took root in them; with the prophets it

sprang up; with the apostles it grew tall; in the Church it became
a great tree putting forth innumerable branches laden with gifts.

(Sermon 98)³

1. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 10 vols. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1885–96), 2:578.

2. M. F. Toal, trans. and ed., *The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers: A Manual of Preaching, Spiritual Reading, and Meditation*, 4 vols. (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1958), 1:349.

3. E. Barnecut, ed., *Journey with the Fathers: Commentaries on the Sunday Gospels*, Year B (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1995), 90–91.

8.32

Luke 16:19–31—Rich Man and Lazarus

Saint Ephrem the Syrian (ca. 306–373) lived in different parts of modern-day Turkey and wrote theological works as well as poems, sermons, and hymns. Facing persecution from Persians, he spent the last ten years of his life in a cave, devoted to poverty and asceticism. He is venerated as a saint in Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Anglican communities.

When reflecting on the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31), he was particularly struck by the refusal of “Father Abraham” to grant any clemency to the condemned rich man—particularly since Abraham is known to have sought clemency for the residents of Sodom on one occasion (see Gen. 18:16–33). Was the problem simply that the rich man waited until it was too late (he was already in Hades), or was there something so insidious in his apathy toward poor Lazarus as to render his sin less pardonable than those of the Sodomites?

“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man’s table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. The poor man died and the dogs would come and lick his sores. The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was being

tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. He called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.' But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.' He said, 'Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father's house—for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.' Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.' He said, 'No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'" (Luke 16:19–31)

Saint Ephrem the Syrian comments:

See then! The more the rich man lived sumptuously, the more Lazarus was humbled. The more Lazarus was made low, the greater was his crown. Why was it, therefore, that he should have seen Abraham above all the just, and Lazarus in his bosom? It was because Abraham loved the poor that he saw him, so that we might learn that we cannot hope for pardon at the end, unless the fruits of pardon can be seen in us. If then

Abraham, who was friendly to strangers, and had mercy on Sodom, was not able to have mercy on the one who did not show pity to Lazarus, how can we hope that there will be pardon for us?¹ (Ephrem, *Selected Prose Works* [Catholic University Press of America, 1994], p. 235–36).

In addition to his commentary on this parable, Ephrem also penned a hymn.²

1. Ephrem, *Selected Prose Works* (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press of America, 1994), 235–36.

2. For more information on this hymn and other works by Ephrem, see *Hymns on Paradise* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1990), 129; and David B. Gowler, *The Parables after Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016), 47–50.

8.33

Authorship of Luke's Gospel

What Is Generally Accepted

The author of Luke is also the author of the book of Acts.

The author of Luke is not an eyewitness of the ministry of Jesus but rather depends on those who were (1:2).

The author of Luke is a well-educated person who is acquainted with both Old Testament literary tradition (especially the Septuagint) and Hellenistic literary techniques.

What Is Disputed

Was the Author "Luke the Physician" a Companion of Paul?

Evidence in favor: The writer refers to himself as a companion of Paul in what are called the "we passages" of Acts (16:10–17; 20:5–15; 21:1–18; 27:1–28:16).

However, this is taken by some as a literary device or as a carryover from the author's source, rather than as evidence that the author himself was present with Paul.

Evidence in favor: Church tradition identifies the author as "Luke the physician," whom Paul refers to in Colossians 4:14 as being among his companions (see also Rom. 16:21; Philem. 24; 2 Tim. 4:11). The earliest such witness is the Muratorian Canon, dated

170–180. It is unlikely that the church would invent a tradition attributing authorship to a relatively unknown and unimportant figure.

However, this identification may be based on a prior assumption (deduced from the “we passages”) that the author is Paul’s companion and so cannot be used as evidence for that point.

Evidence in favor: Luke’s Gospel and Acts use a relatively high proportion of “medical” terms.

However, it has been shown that Luke’s so-called medical vocabulary is used by nonmedical writers and is evidence only of a well-educated author rather than of one who is necessarily a physician.

Evidence against: The theology of Luke’s Gospel and Acts differs from that of Paul in important areas. First, a “theology of glory” replaces Paul’s “theology of the cross.” The death of Jesus is not expiatory (Mark 10:45 is omitted) but rather is viewed as a martyr’s death (Luke 23:47; cf. Mark 15:39). Second, Paul’s imminent eschatology is replaced by a concept of salvation history that allows for an extended era of “the church.”

However, the validity of these and other distinctions is debated.

Numerous points of contact between the theology of Luke/Acts and the theology of Paul may also be pointed out. Moreover, the author could have been a companion of Paul without being his disciple and so would not necessarily conform to his theology.

Evidence against: The picture of Paul presented in the book of Acts is historically inconsistent with that presented by Paul himself in his own letters.

- The account of the Jerusalem council in Acts 15 is quite different from that given by Paul in Galatians 2.
- Acts does not usually call Paul an “apostle,” a title that was very important for Paul (but see Acts 14:4, 14).
- Acts presents Paul as a mighty miracle worker, but Paul’s own letters make no mention of the miracles he is said to have performed.
- Acts 17 reports Paul as saying that gentile pagans may worship God without knowing him, but Paul himself says just the opposite in Romans 1:21: “Though they knew God, they did not honor him as God.”
- In Acts, Paul does not preach justification by faith or proclaim freedom from the law for gentiles, although these are two of the most important recurring themes in his letters.
- Acts reports neither the several floggings and shipwrecks that Paul refers to in 2 Corinthians 11:24–25 nor the sojourn in Arabia that he mentions in Galatians 1:17–22. It leaves out other information basic to his biography: he wrote letters to his churches; he planned to visit Spain; the collection for

Jerusalem was the motive for his fatal return to that city; he was executed in Rome.

However, on the one hand, all of these discrepancies may be interpreted as Luke's idealization of Paul in the interests of making him serve the author's own theological purpose; on the other hand, there is enough reliable historical information to infer that the author might have had limited contact with Paul and some knowledge of his travels.

Was the Author Jewish or Gentile?

Evidence that he was Jewish: Luke's Gospel and Acts show a strong interest in the Old Testament and its phraseology. The infancy narrative (Luke 1–2) seems to be consciously written in a style that imitates the Old Testament, and the speech of Stephen (Acts 7) rehearses the salvation history of the Old Testament.

However, these and other portions of Luke's writings that reflect Jewish heritage could be drawn from sources not written by the evangelist himself; furthermore, it is not unlikely that an educated gentile Christian could be interested and well versed in Jewish Scripture.

Evidence that he was Jewish: If the author is identified as "Luke the physician," it may be that Paul refers to him as among his "relatives" in Romans 16:21.

However, it is not certain that the *Loukios* of Romans 16:21 is the same person as the *Loukas* of Colossians 4:14; also, it is not clear whether Luke is here referred to as the kinsman of Paul or of Tertius (Rom. 16:22).

Evidence that he was gentile: Luke's Gospel and Acts avoid the use of Semitic words (except *Amen*), and transform certain Palestinian details into Hellenistic counterparts.

However, these aspects of Luke's Gospel could be accommodations for Hellenistic and gentile readers that do not reflect the ethnic character of the author.

Evidence that he was gentile: If the author is identified as "Luke the physician," it may be that Paul distinguishes him from his companions who are "of the circumcision" in Colossians 4:14 (cf. Col. 4:10–11).

However, it is not certain that the phrase "the circumcision" refers to all Jews or simply to a party within Judaism to which Luke does not belong.

8.34

The Community of Luke: Clues from the Gospel and Acts

The community includes Jews and gentiles:

Large conversions of both Jews and gentiles are depicted in

Acts (2:41; 4:4; 6:7; 11:20–21; 13:43; 14:1; 17:4; 18:8).

The agreement in Acts 15:19–20 is intended to facilitate

community fellowship between Jews and gentiles.

The community is urban:

The word “city” (*polis*) is used eighty-two times (thirty-nine in

Luke); the word “village” (*kōmē*) is used only thirteen times

(twelve in Luke).

The community includes people who are rich and poor:

A principal concern is how the rich should relate to the poor

(Luke 1:53; 12:31–34; 14:12–14; 16:19–31; 19:1–10; 21:1–4;

Acts 2:44–45; 4:32–35; 5:1–11; 9:36; 10:2, 4, 31).

The “rich” and the “poor” are mentioned more often than in any

other Gospel (Luke 6:20, 24; 7:22; 12:16–21; 14:21; 18:24–

27; 19:1–19).

The community is well organized:

Offices and position of community leadership can be discerned

(Luke 11:49; Acts 11:27–28; 13:1–3; 14:23; 15:32; 20:17; 21:10–11, 18).

The community faces trouble from without:

The Gospel speaks of persecution from Jews (Luke 6:22–23; 11:49–50; 21:12, 16).

The Gospel speaks of persecution from gentiles (Luke 21:12, 17).

The community faces trouble from within:

The Gospel speaks of people losing their faith and becoming apostate (Luke 8:13; 18:8).

The Gospel seeks to address the question of why the kingdom of God has not yet appeared (Luke 17:20–21; 19:11; cf. Acts 1:6–7).

At one time, most scholars believed that Luke wrote his books for a particular congregation in a specific geographical locale. The information given above was taken as descriptive of that “community” (wherever it was located). Today, most scholars think that Luke assumed that his works would be distributed throughout the Roman Empire. Thus the information given above is taken as more descriptive of a generic “community of readers”—the people whom Luke hopes to address through his Gospel and the book of Acts.

8.35

Luke's Use of Mark (Box 8.2)

According to the dominant source theories, Luke preserves only a little more than half of the Gospel of Mark, and he edits what he does preserve in accord with certain principles. Studying these editorial changes is the work of redaction critics (see “Redaction Criticism” in chap. 3 of the textbook).

Organization

Some Markan material is moved about.

Examples:

- The story of Jesus preaching in Nazareth is moved forward to provide the occasion for his inaugural sermon (Luke 4:16–30; cf. Mark 6:1–6).
- The disciples' dispute over who is the greatest is moved to take place at the final supper (Luke 22:24–27; cf. Mark 10:41–45).

Abbreviation

Luke omits from Mark's stories what he considers to be insignificant or inappropriate.

Examples:

- a comment on the incompetence of physicians (Luke 8:42–48; cf. Mark 5:26)
- conversation between Jesus and the father of a demoniac child (Luke 9:37–43; cf. Mark 9:21–24)
- the naked young man in the garden (Luke 22:47–53; cf. Mark 14:43–52)

Note: Matthew's Gospel also omits this Markan material (Matt. 9:20–22; 17:14–18; 26:47–56).

Sophistication

Casual or colloquial expressions are rewritten in the more polished Greek of the educated class.

Examples:

- Instances of the “historical present” tense are changed (150 out of 151; he missed Mark 5:35 at Luke 8:49).
- Mark's repetitious use of words such as “and” and “immediately” is reduced.
- Clear antecedents are provided to pronouns that lack them.
- Use of syntactical constructions such as genitive absolutes and articular infinitives is increased (these portend a “higher class” of Greek).

Accuracy

Instances of questionable accuracy are corrected.

Examples:

- “King Herod” (Mark 6:14) becomes “Herod the tetrarch” (Luke 9:7).
- The reference to Abiathar as high priest in Mark 2:26 is omitted (Luke 6:4; cf. 1 Sam 21:1–6).

Contextual Relevance

Some changes make things more relevant to Luke’s intended audience.

Examples:

- Probably because he is writing for a culturally diverse audience throughout the Roman Empire, Luke eliminates all eight of the Aramaic expressions found in Mark: “Boanerges” (3:17); “talitha cum” (5:41); “corban” (7:11); “ephphatha” (7:34); “Bartimaeus” (10:46); “Abba” (14:36); “Golgotha” (15:22); “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani” (15:34).
- Notations providing broad historical/cultural context are introduced (cf. Luke 3:1–3 with Mark 1:4) because Luke wants the story he tells to be received as a work of “world history” with implications for all humanity.
- The word for “village” (*kōmē*) is often changed to that for “city” (*polis*) in order to give the story a more urban feel that transcends its setting in rural Palestine.

- The monetary value of coins is increased in order to keep the story relevant for those who live more prosperously than did Jesus and his original followers (cf. Luke 9:3, where the Greek word *argyrion* means “silver,” with Mark 6:8, where the Greek *chalkos* means “copper”).

Character Portrayal

Luke changes the way major characters are portrayed in the Gospel story, including Jesus, his disciples, and his family.

Jesus

- Statements that imply a lack of ability or authority on Jesus’s part are omitted (comment in Mark 6:5 does not appear in Luke 4:16–30).
- References to Jesus exhibiting human emotions are dropped: pity (Mark 1:41), anger (Mark 3:5), sadness (Mark 3:5), wonder (Mark 6:6), compassion (Mark 6:34), indignation (Mark 10:14), and love (Mark 10:21).
- Some stories in which Jesus acts in a somewhat violent way are omitted (cursing of the fig tree [Mark 11:12–14, 20–25; cf. Luke 16:6–9]; overturning tables in the temple [Mark 11:15–17; cf. Luke 19:45–46]).
- Stories that might seem to portray Jesus as a magician are dropped (Mark 7:31–37; 8:22–26).

Disciples

- Stories of Jesus rebuking Peter (Mark 8:33), of James and John's presumptuous request (Mark 10:35–40), and of the disciples' flight at Jesus's arrest are eliminated.
- Peter's denial (Luke 22:31–34; Mark 14:29–31) and the disciples' sleep in Gethsemane (Luke 22:45–46; Mark 14:37–41) are muted and explained.
- Lack of understanding is attributed not to the disciples' unperceptive nature but instead to divine concealment (cf. Luke 9:45 with Mark 9:32; see Luke 18:34).

Jesus's family

- Reference to Jesus's family "coming to seize him" is dropped (Mark 3:21).
- Story of Jesus designating his "true family" is reworded to lessen the contrast with his earthly family (cf. Luke 8:19–21 with Mark 3:31–35).

8.36

Expanding Mark: How Matthew and Luke Arranged Their Gospels

The Gospel of Mark tells the story of Jesus in two major phases:

1. the story of Jesus's adult life and ministry (1:1–10:52)
2. the story of Jesus's passion—the events leading up to and including his arrest, crucifixion, and resurrection (11:1–16:8)

According to the Two-Source Hypothesis, Matthew and Luke both had copies of Mark's Gospel and when they produced their Gospels they added material from Q and other sources (material that we call M when it was used by Matthew, and L when it was used by Luke).

But as these two evangelists went about expanding Mark, each of them had to ask, "Where should I put the additional material?"

Some decisions were obvious:

- genealogies and birth stories are added to the beginning (Matt. 1–2; Luke 1–2)
- resurrection stories are added at the end (Matt. 28:11–20; Luke 24:13–52).

All of that material would come from M and L.

But according to the Two-Source Hypothesis, Matthew and Luke also had copies of Q, which reported the teaching of Jesus, and they

also had other traditions regarding things that Jesus had said or done.

They probably did not know the chronology for any of this material—*when* Jesus had said or done these things—so there was no obvious place where the material should go.

- Matthew decided to break up the story of Jesus’s ministry by having him deliver five long speeches or sermons (chaps. 5–7; 10; 13; 18; 24–25).
- Luke decided to put most of the extra material into a new portion of the narrative, a mid-section that relates a long journey of Jesus to Jerusalem (9:51–19:44).

One consequence of these organizing techniques is that the teaching of Jesus is set in different contexts in these two Gospels.

- In Matthew’s Gospel, the teaching of Jesus occurs in a somewhat academic context akin to a *classroom*: Jesus is the rabbi, instructing his disciples in thematic lessons.
- In Luke’s Gospel, discipleship seems more like an immersion experience, or learning “on the job.” Jesus takes his disciples with him on a trip, and they learn from what he says and does along the way.

8.37

Luke 2:14—Peace on Earth for Whom?

Luke 2:14 reports the song that the angels sang to shepherds on the night of Jesus’s birth. The words have been translated differently in various versions of the Bible—possibly none of which is accurate.

King James Version	New Revised Standard Version	New International Version	English Standard Version
“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”	“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”	“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”	“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased.”

The KJV translation was based on a Greek manuscript that no longer commands much respect among scholars: the word translated “good will” was a Greek noun (*eudokia*). Thus there is a wish for people to receive two things—peace and good will.

Older and better manuscripts use a Greek adjective (*eudokias*) instead of the noun. Virtually all modern translations recognize this and take the adjective as modifying the word for “people” (translated “men” in the KJV).

Then there is a wish for people to receive only one thing (peace) but the people who will receive this blessing are described by the adjective *eudokias* as “pleasing to God.”

Even so, there would be two possible ways to understand the adjective *eudokias*. Just like English adjectives, it could serve (1) to limit or specify *which* people the angels hope will receive peace on earth, or (2) to indicate *why* the angels expect people to receive peace on earth.

Put simply, a literal translation of the verse would be either

1. “Glory to God in the highest (heaven), and on earth peace among people with whom God is pleased,” or
2. “Glory to God in the highest (heaven), and on earth peace among people, with whom God is pleased.”

In the first instance, the angels do not wish for there to be peace on earth among all people—the blessing is for only the people with whom God is pleased. Notably, this is the sense in which modern English translations interpret the angels’ song (including the NRSV, NIV, and ESV cited above).

In the second instance, the angels do wish for there to be peace on earth among all people—and the stated reason for this is because people are pleasing to God. This sense would reiterate God’s affirmation of humanity at creation (Gen. 1:31). It would also seem to fit well with a motif of Luke-Acts, what is sometimes called “Lukan generosity.”

A better translation of Luke 2:14 is used in the liturgies of many churches (though not found in any edition of the Bible): “Glory to God in the highest and peace to God’s people on earth.”

The advantage of this rendering is simple: like the Greek, it is ambiguous and could be taken in either of two senses: Does the church wish for there to be peace for all people, since all people are “God’s people”? Or does the church wish for there to be peace only among those people who are rightly considered to be “God’s people”?

8.38

Luke 11:2–4—The Lord’s Prayer

Early Christians treasured a prayer that they said Jesus had taught his disciples, and they made it part of their private devotional lives and liturgical worship services. Traditionally called “the Lord’s Prayer” or “the Our Father,” the prayer is preserved in three early documents: Matthew 6:9–13; Luke 11:2–4; *Didache* 8:2 (the *Didache* being a nonbiblical writing from the early second century). The prayer is very Jewish in form and content. Indeed, in Matthew, Jesus presents it in explicit contrast to the type of prayers said by gentiles (6:7).

The metaphorical identification of God as “Father” is typical for Matthew, occurring ten times in 6:1–18 alone (see also 5:16, 45, 48; 6:26, 32; 7:11, 21; 10:32, 33; 12:50; 15:13; 16:17; 18:10, 14, 19, 35; 20:23; 25:34; 26:29, 42, 53; 28:19). For Matthew, this image presents God as both a caring parent and an authority figure, as the one whose unilateral decisions are to be respected by the whole family of believers (cf. 23:9). By encouraging his followers to call God “Father,” Jesus urges them both to respect God’s authority and to trust in God’s generosity and providential wisdom.

The prayers for God’s name to be hallowed, for God’s kingdom to come, and for God’s will to be done are parallel petitions that state the same basic request three times in slightly different words. For

Matthew, the essential request is for God to bring to fulfillment what has begun with Jesus. The kingdom has already drawn near (4:17), Jesus and his followers are bringing God's will to accomplishment (5:17), and God's name is being glorified on account of them (5:16). Jesus's followers are to pray for the work of Christ to continue.

Three more petitions make simple requests of God, ones that Jesus deems appropriate for people to make at any time. The request for "daily bread" flows from an assumption that all followers of Jesus will embrace a simple lifestyle. Bread serves as a metaphor for life's necessities; Jesus's followers are to ask that God provide them with what they need, no more, but also no less.

The request for forgiveness of sins (literally, "debts") is traditional for Judaism. Jesus attaches to it a reminder that those who seek such forgiveness ought also to forgive others. To emphasize the point, Matthew quotes another saying of Jesus on this subject (6:14–15) and elsewhere records a parable that Jesus told to illustrate the lesson (18:23–35). Within the Sermon on the Mount, this need to forgive others becomes the only facet of Jesus's moral teaching deemed so important that his followers are to remind themselves of it every time they pray.

The next petition is easily misunderstood when translated, "Lead us not into temptation," since neither Matthew nor Jesus would have wanted to imply the possibility that God might tempt people to sin. Rather, the request is for God to guide Jesus's followers in such a

way that they will not experience trials that could test their faith (cf. 26:41). According to the parable of the sower (13:3–9, 18–23), such trials might take the form of hardship (“trouble or persecution”) or distraction (“the cares of the world and the lure of wealth”).

Elsewhere, Matthew indicates that some trials are inevitable (18:7; 24:9–13). Thus the petition continues with the plea “Deliver us from evil” (or, “the evil one”). Jesus’s followers are to ask that they be spared trials whenever possible, and, when this is not possible, that they be protected from the potentially destructive consequences of such experiences (cf. James 1:2–4; 1 Pet. 1:6–7).

A well-known conclusion to the Lord’s Prayer (“Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever, Amen”) was not originally in the Bible. It was written by early Christians when the prayer came to be used in liturgical worship. Later, some copies of the New Testament began adding the conclusion to the text with the result that it is found today in a few English translations (including the KJV).

Primary Resources

Matthias, Philip. *The Perfect Prayer: Search for the Kingdom through the Lord’s Prayer*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2005.

Stevenson, Kenneth W. *The Lord’s Prayer: A Text in Tradition*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004.

Related Resources

Cullman, Oscar. *Prayer in the New Testament*. OBT. Minneapolis:

Fortress, 1995.

Karris, Robert J. *Prayer and the New Testament: Jesus and His*

Communities at Worship. New York: Crossroad, 2000.

Longenecker, Richard N. *Into God's Presence: Prayer in the New*

Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001.

8.39

Luke 22:14–34—The Last Supper and Other Suppers in the Gospel of Luke

In the Gospel of Luke, the Last Supper is the last in a series of suppers at which Jesus has been present throughout the narrative. It has some of the same characteristics as those other meals.

Suppers Are Supposed to Be Inclusive Events

Jews eat with gentiles (4:25–26; 10:7–8).

Saints eat with sinners (5:30; 15:1–2; 19:5–7).

Clean eat with unclean (14:12–13; cf. 11:37–38).

At the Last Supper, Jesus eats with transgressors (22:21, 34).

Suppers Are Occasions for Instruction in Humility and Service

Lack of etiquette reveals lack of love (7:44–47).

Guests should show humility (14:7–11; cf. 20:46).

Hosts should show humility (14:12–14).

People who serve Jesus act as “deacons” (*diakoneō*), literally “table waiters” (4:39; 8:3; 10:40; cf. 12:37; 17:8; Acts 6:1–6).

At the Last Supper, Jesus teaches about service and humility (22:24–27).

Suppers Are a Symbol of God's Blessing

Servants are rewarded by eating at the master's table (12:35–37).

The kingdom of God is like a banquet (13:29; 14:15–24).

Suppers are occasions for forgiveness, repentance, and reconciliation (7:48–50; 19:5–7).

At the Last Supper, Jesus speaks of the blessing to come in the kingdom of God (22:18, 28–30).

8.40

Luke 1:46–55—The World’s First Advent Hymn

German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was martyred under the Nazi regime in 1945, writes:

The song of Mary is the oldest Advent hymn. It is at once the most passionate, the wildest, one might even say the most revolutionary Advent hymn ever sung. This is not the gentle, tender, dreamy Mary whom we sometimes see in paintings; this is the passionate, surrendered, proud, enthusiastic Mary who speaks out here.

This song has none of the sweet, nostalgic, or even playful tones of some of our Christmas carols. It is instead a hard, strong, inexorable song about collapsing thrones and humbled lords of this world, about the power of God and the powerlessness of humankind. These are the tones of the women prophets of the Old Testament that now come to life in Mary’s mouth. (Advent Sermon, 1933)

The Magnificat

My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.

His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.

Luke 1:46–55

8.41

Was Mary's Magnificat Banned in Guatemala?

In February 1993, the *Chicago Sun-Times* reported:

In Guatemala, the mother of Jesus became a fulcrum for liberation theology's social justice movement, compelling the government to ban the singing of the Song of Mary or the Magnificat (Luke 1:46–55) as subversive. In it Mary proclaims that God will bring down the mighty, raise up the lowly and feed the hungry.¹

This claim is made repeatedly in works on liberation theology and spirituality and, eventually it became an axiom cited in numerous works on Luke's Gospel or on Christian liturgy.

For example, the Benedictine poet and essayist Kathleen Norris says:

Mary utters a song so powerful that its meaning still resonates in profound and disturbing ways. In the twentieth century Mary's "Magnificat" became a cornerstone of liberation theology, so much so that during the 1980's the government of Guatemala found its message so subversive that it banned its recitation in public worship.²

The claim is often stated authoritatively, but those who have tried to substantiate it have found no evidence of an actual government proclamation to this effect. While the Guatemalan government

definitely disapproved of the Christian base communities that heralded the Magnificat as an anthem of liberation, it apparently did not officially ban use of the hymn (a staple of the Roman Catholic liturgy), at least not in any manner that left a paper trail.

It is, of course, possible and probably likely that use of the Magnificat was discouraged due to its association with revolutionary political groups, and such discouragement may have been expressed in a variety of ways in different settings.

Resistance to oppressive governments in Guatemala, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and other Latin American countries was widespread in the 1980s and such resistance found spiritual and ideological support in the liberation theology movement. Sentiments of that movement may be seen in a 1979 document issued by the bishops of Latin America:

The poor [referred to in Mary's Magnificat] do not lack simply material goods. They also miss, on the level of human dignity, full participation in sociopolitical life. Those found in this category are principally our indigenous people, peasants, manual laborers, marginalized urban dwellers, and in particular, the women of these social groups. The women are doubly oppressed and marginalized.³

So, poet Norris cited above continues:

The Magnificat reminds us that what we most value, all that gives us status—power, pride, strength and wealth—can be a barrier to receiving what God has in store for us. If we have it all,

or think we can buy it all, there will be no Christmas for us. If we are full of ourselves, there will be no room for God to enter our hearts at Christmas.

Mary's prayer of praise, like many of the psalms, calls us to consider our true condition: God is God, and we are the creatures God formed out of earth. The nations are but nations, and even the power of a mighty army cannot save us. We all return to dust. And if we hope to rise in God's new creation, where love and justice will reign triumphant, our responsibility, here and now, is to reject the temptation to employ power and force and oppression against those weaker than ourselves.

We honour the Incarnation best by honouring God's image in all people, and seeking to make this world into a place of welcome for the Prince of Peace.⁴

The Magnificat

My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,

and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.

Luke 1:46–55

1. Larry Stammer, "Theologians Question Role of Virgin Mary," *Chicago Sun-Times*, Feb. 7, 1993.
2. Kathleen Norris, "Fourth Week of Advent," in *God With Us*, ed. Greg Pennoyer and Gregory Wolfe (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2007), 99.
3. Council of Latin American Bishops, "Final Documents of Puebla," third general meeting of the council, January 1979, footnote to §1135.
4. Norris, "Fourth Week of Advent," 113–14.

8.42

Excerpt from a Christmas Eve Sermon by Martin

Luther (Box 8.3)

The inn was full. No one would release a room to this pregnant woman. She had to go to a cow stall and there bring forth the Maker of all creatures because nobody would give way.

Shame on you, wretched Bethlehem! The inn ought to have been burned with brimstone, for even though Mary had been a beggar maid or unwed, anybody at such a time would have been glad to give her a hand.

There are many of you in this congregation who think to yourselves: "If only I had been there! How quick I would have been to help the baby! I would have washed his linen! How happy I would have been to go with the shepherds to see the Lord lying in the manger!"

Yes you would! You say that because you know how great Christ is, but if you had been there at that time you would have done no better than the people of Bethlehem. Childish and silly thoughts are these!

Why don't you do it now? You have Christ in your neighbor. You ought to serve Him, for what you do to your neighbor in need you do to the Lord Christ Himself.

Quoted in Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (1950; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009), 365.

8.43

Luke 2:14—Ancient and Modern Poems

Luke 2:14 records the words of a song that the angels sang to shepherds on Christmas Eve, the night of Jesus's birth.

Early in church history, the words of this song were translated into Latin and became a standard part of weekly liturgical services. The song was called the "Glória in Excélsis": "Glória in excélsis Deo et in terra pax homínibus bonæ voluntátis"

The "Gloria in Excelsis" continues to be sung regularly in most churches that use liturgical worship, though the words are often translated into English or another appropriate language: "Glory to God in the highest and peace to God's people on earth."

Verses are often added (to Latin and other versions). This liturgical usage made the words of the angels' song even better known than they would have been otherwise, and they are frequently referenced in Western literature.

John Greenleaf Whittier (1807–92): The American Quaker and abolitionist associates the angels' song with human yearning:

Lend, once again, that holy song a tongue,
Which the glad angels of the Advent sung,
Their cradle-anthem for the Saviour's birth,
Glory to God, and peace unto the earth.

From "The Peace Convention at Brussels"

Robert Bridges (1844–1930): In 1913, Bridges, the poet laureate of Britain, could use the Latin phrase for “peace on earth among people of good will” and trust his audience would understand. On the eve of World War I, he called his countryfolk to aspire to “*pax hominibus bonae voluntatis*” (“Noel: Christmas Eve, 1913”).

Bono (1960–): The British lyricist born Paul David Hewson, whose stage name with U2 is Bono, is skeptical whether there will ever be fulfillment of the words, which he attributes to Jesus himself rather to the angels celebrating his birth.

Jesus, in the song you wrote
The words are sticking in my throat
Peace on earth
Hear it every Christmas time

From “Peace on Earth”

8.44

Luke 4:1–13—Jesus Quotes Scripture to Satan (and Vice Versa)

The Gospels of Matthew and Luke record the story of Jesus’s temptation by Satan in the wilderness. Their versions are quite similar, though their orders of temptations differ.

Matthew 4:1–11	Luke 4:1–13
<p>Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. 3 The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” 4 But he answered, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”</p> <p>5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, 6 saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’” 7 Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”</p> <p>8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; 9 and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” 10 Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! for it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’”</p> <p>11 Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.</p>	<p>Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, 2 where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. 3 The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.” 4 Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’”</p> <p>5 Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. 6 And the devil said to him, “To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. 7 If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.”</p> <p>8 Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’”</p> <p>9 Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, 10 for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,’ 11 and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’”</p> <p>12 Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”</p> <p>13 When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.</p>

Numerous scholars would note the words “it is written” (or “it is said”) and, from this, they deduce a strategy for overcoming the devil’s snares:

The first thing worth noting is that Christ uses Scripture as a shield against Satan, and this is the true way of fighting, if we wish to win a sure victor. (John Calvin, *Harmony of the Gospels* 1.135)¹

Satan discovers that while persuasive rhetoric had been powerful enough to defeat Eve (see Gen. 3:1–1–7), the “It is written” of scripture is more powerful still. Christ refutes Satan not with rational argument but with revelation.²

Also noticed at times is how Satan quotes Scripture to Jesus! In Matthew 4:6 and Luke 4:10, Satan cites a passage from Psalm 91:11–12 in an attempt to convince Jesus that he should trust God to preserve him from a foolish death.

This would inspire some memorable lines from William Shakespeare:

The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose.
An evil soul producing holy witness
Is like a villain with a smiling cheek,
A goodly apple rotten at the heart.
O, what a goodly outside falsehood hath!

The Merchant of Venice, Act I, Scene 3

1. John Calvin, *A Harmony of the Gospels*, vol. 1, trans. A. W. Morrison (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 137.
2. David Lyle Jeffrey, ed., *Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 754.

8.45

Luke 4:5–8—Satan’s Offer to Christ in Milton’s *Paradise Regained*

The Gospels of Matthew and Luke both record a story of Jesus being tempted by Satan in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1–11; Luke 4:1–13). In one portion of that story, after failing to entice Jesus with other temptations, Satan flat out offers Jesus “the kingdoms of the world” in exchange for worshipping him.

Matthew 4:8–10	Luke 4:5–8
The devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! for it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’”	Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, “To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’”

This story would serve as the primary inspiration for John Milton’s classic work *Paradise Regained* (1671):

Then the Tempter said,
 “I see all offers made by me how slight
 Thou valu’st, because offered, and reject’st.
 Nothing will please the difficult and nice,
 Or nothing more than still to contradict.
 On the other side know also thou that I
 On what I offer set as high esteem,

Nor what I part with mean to give for naught,
All these, which in a moment thou behold'st,
The kingdoms of the world, to thee I give
(For, given to me, I give to whom I please),
No trifle; yet with this reserve, not else--
On this condition, if thou wilt fall down,
And worship me as thy superior Lord
(Easily done), and hold them all of me;
For what can less so great a gift deserve?"

Book 4, lines 154–170

8.46

Luke 9:62—Thomas Hardy and a Gospel Song

In Luke 9:62, Jesus comments on the half-hearted commitment of a would-be follower by saying, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”

The saying employs an agricultural image: in order to plow straight furrows, one must look ahead at a fixed point; if one looks back to see if the furrow is straight, the plow will almost certainly move to the side.

Because of this saying, “Keep your hand to the plow” became a popular expression for “Focus on the future.” In a broader sense, keeping one’s hand to the plow implies persistence and a refusal to give up.

Tess of the D’Urbervilles

In Thomas Hardy’s 1891 novel *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, a preacher named Alec takes a break from his mission to court Tess. He tells her, “I believe that if the bachelor-apostle, whose deputy I thought I was, had been tempted by such a pretty face, he would have let go the plough for her sake as I do.”

The “bachelor-apostle” would be Paul, and Alec apparently thinks that it was Paul (not Jesus) who said one who has put hand to the

plow should not look back. In any case, he realizes that this is what he is doing but thinks Tess's charms should admit an exception.

Gospel Plow

The imagery from Luke 9:62 also figures heavily in an American gospel song. Variouslly called "Gospel Plow" or "Hold On," it is often associated with Bob Dylan, who recorded it on his 1962 self-titled debut album. The composer is unknown, however, and though first published in 1940, it had been sung for years prior to that.

Mary wore three links of chain

Every link was Jesus name

Keep your hand on that plow, hold on

Oh Lord, Oh Lord, keep your hand on that plow, hold on.

8.47

Luke 10:38–42—A Children’s Song

Luke’s Gospel contains the story of Jesus’s meeting with two sisters named Mary and Martha.

Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me.” But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.” (Luke 10:38–42)

This story served as the inspiration for a children’s song composed by Grammy-nominated musician Justin Roberts. The song, called “Shh Shh Shh,” capitalizes on the sibling rivalry to delight children with exchanges set to a very catchy melody and a rhythmic rock-’n’-roll beat.

In one verse, Mary tells Martha to “Shh Shh Shh,” so that she can listen to Jesus’s teachings. But Martha responds that she does not have time to “Shh Shh Shh” because she has too much to do. The overall theme is a simple invitation to be still and appreciate the moments of life for what they are.

Roberts is a Chicago-based American singer-songwriter who performs children's music with an ensemble called the Not Ready for Naptime Players. Luke's Gospel appears to be a favorite source of inspiration, since he also has a song about Zacchaeus (see Luke 19:1–10), called "What's He Doing Up There?," and a song about the Parable of the Great Dinner (see Luke 14:16–24), called "Guess Who's." These songs and others are featured on his album, *Why Not Sea Monsters?: Songs From the New Testament* (2005).

8.48

Luke 13:6–9—Barren Fig Tree

Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. So he said to the gardener, ‘See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?’ He replied, ‘Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’” (Luke 13:6–9)

John Bunyan (author of *Pilgrim’s Progress*) preached a sermon in 1673 on Luke 13:6–9, stressing the limits of God’s forbearance.

Barren Fig-tree, *Dost thou hear?*
the Ax is laid to thy roots, the Lord Jesus prays God to spare
thee;
Hath he been digging about thee?
Hath he been *dunging* of thee?
O Barren Fig-tree, *Now* thou art come to the point;
if thou shalt *now* become good,
if thou shalt after a gracious manner suck in the Gospel-dung,
and if thou shalt bring forth fruit unto God . . . *Well!*
But if not, *the fire is the last.*
Fruit or the Fire!
Fruit or the Fire, Barren Fig-tree!¹

1. John Bunyan, *The Barren Fig-tree* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986).

8.49

Luke 15:4–7—Lost Sheep

Jesus's parable of the lost sheep is told in Luke 15:4–7:

“Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.”

The parable (another version of the parable is found in Matt. 18:10–14) inspired an 1868 poem by Elizabeth Clephane, “The Ninety and Nine.” The poem tells of the shepherd’s quest to recover the sheep in terms that clearly recall Christ’s passion and suffering for sinners.

The second verse reads:

“Lord, Thou hast here Thy ninety and nine;
Are they not enough for Thee?”
But the Shepherd made answer: “This of Mine
Has wandered away from Me.
And although the road be rough and steep,
I go to the desert to find My sheep.”

It was discovered after the poet's death by the evangelist L. Dwight Moody, who was touring Scotland. Moody's music minister, Ira D. Sankey, set the poem to music and it became a beloved hymn for those who appreciated its piety and sentimentality.

8.50

Luke 15:11–32—“The Prodigal Son” by James Weldon Johnson

James Weldon Johnson (1871–1938) was an American author, politician, and civil rights activist known for his leadership within the NAACP and remembered as the composer of the hymn, “Lift Every Voice and Sing.” He was one of the first African Americans to hold tenured positions at major American universities (New York and Fisk) and he left behind a body of poems, many of which have religious or biblical themes. “The Prodigal Son” is one of his best known works, remembered especially for its opening stanza.

Young man—

Young man—

Your arm's too short to box with God.

8.51

Luke 15:11–32—Parable of the Prodigal Son

Jesus’s parable of the Prodigal Son provided the inspiration for at least one famous rock song of the twentieth century.

“Prodigal Son,” written by blues legend Robert Wilkins, came to the attention of millions when The Rolling Stones recorded it for their iconic album, *Beggars’ Banquet* (an album that begins somewhat ironically with “Sympathy for the Devil” but concludes with a gospel song, “Salt of the Earth,” both written by Mick Jagger and Keith Richards). Wilkins himself had recorded the song in 1929; his version was called “That Ain’t No Way to Get Along” and was longer, with slightly different lyrics.¹

“Prodigal Son” by Robert Wilkins

Well a poor boy took his father’s bread
and started down the road
. . . Took all he had and started down the road
Going out in this world, where God only knows²

1. For discussion and analysis of Wilkin’s version, see David B. Gowler, *The Parables after Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1916), 213–18.

2. Lyrics as recorded by The Rolling Stones, *Beggar’s Banquet* (Decca, 1968).

8.52

Luke 16:19–31—Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus

Pope Gregory the Great (ca. 540–604) was the son of an aristocratic Roman senator who became a monk and then used his inheritance to found seven monasteries. In 590 he became pope, and he is remembered as an especially influential and effective pontiff.

One of the many things for which he is remembered is his emphasis on charity: he devoted vast sums of the church's resources to helping the poor and encouraged individuals to be similarly generous.

This concern for the needy is evident in his comments on Jesus's Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. First, the parable:

“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. He called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.’ But Abraham

said, 'Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.' He said, 'Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father's house—for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.' Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.' He said, 'No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'" (Luke 16:19–31)

The commentary by Gregory the Great:

My dear brethren, now that you know the glory of Lazarus and the punishment of the rich man, act with extreme caution; seek out the poor, that in the day of judgment they may be your intercessors and advocates.

You have many brothers of Lazarus lying at your doors, in want of those crumbs which fall daily from your table when you have well satisfied your appetite.

The words we have been reading should teach us to fulfill the law of mercy.

Every minute we find a Lazarus if we seek him, and every day
without seeking we find one at our door.

Now—beggars besiege us, imploring alms.

Later—they will be our advocates.

Rather, it is we who should beg, and yet we are besought.

Ask yourselves whether we should refuse what we are asked,
when those who ask us are our patrons. Therefore, do not lose
the opportunity of doing works of mercy; do not store unused the
good things you possess.¹

1. Gregory the Great, *Parables of the Gospel* (Chicago: Scepter, 1960), 158.

8.53

Luke 16:19–31—Frederick Douglass on the Rich Man and Lazarus

Frederick Douglass (ca. 1818–95) was an escaped slave who became a prominent abolitionist during the period of the Civil War. Later he became an ardent supporter of women’s suffrage.

He used the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus to promote both causes, focusing especially on the end of the parable in which the condemned rich man realizes his fate and appeals to “Father Abraham” to get the word to others before it is too late.

There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man’s table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. He called out, “Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.” But Abraham said, “Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. Besides all this,

between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.” He said, “Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father’s house—for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.” Abraham replied, “They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.” He said, “No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.” He said to him, “If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.” (Luke 16:19–31)

Douglass the Abolitionist

In 1865, the year Lincoln would be shot, Douglass identified black slaves with Lazarus in the parable and he identified slave owners with the rich man:

We all know who the rich man is in this country, and who the poor man is, or has been, in this country. The slaves in the South have been the Lazaruses of the South, lying at this rich slaveholder’s gates; but, it has come to pass that the poor man and the rich man are dead, for both have been in dying condition for some time, and the poor man is said to be some where very near in Abraham’s bosom.¹

The last line would bring peals of laughter, for Douglass was using a play on words—his audience quickly associated the name

“Abraham” with Abraham Lincoln, who had recently signed the Emancipation Proclamation:

That rich man is lifting up his eyes in torments down there and seeing Lazarus up in Abraham’s bosom, calling on Father Abraham to send Lazarus back. But Father Abraham says, “If they hear not Grant nor Sherman, neither will they be persuaded though I send Lazarus unto them.”²

Douglass is also playing spatial imagery: in the parable, *down* refers to Hades, but now it can mean “the South”; in the parable, *up* refers to Paradise, but now it can mean the North.

Douglass is mixing his metaphors a bit. On the one hand, the condemned rich man is a symbol for the soon-to-be defeated southerners and the comforted Lazarus is a symbol for escaped slaves who made it to freedom in the north, from which they will not be returned. On the other hand, since Lazarus and the rich man are both dead, they can symbolize the demise of an institution: neither slaves (Lazarus) nor slaveholders (the rich man) will continue to exist in the new union.

Douglass the Suffragette

Years later (1888), Douglass took to calling himself, “a Radical Woman Suffrage Man” and insisted, “When this battle for woman suffrage shall have been fought and the victory won, men will marvel

at the injustice and stupidity which so long deprived American women of the ballot.”³

He revisited the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus in this light:

Woman’s claim to the right of equal participation in government with man, has its foundation in the nature and personality of woman and in the admitted doctrine of American liberty and in the authority and structure of our Republican government. When the rich man wanted someone sent from the dead to warn his brothers against coming where he was, he was told that if they heard not Moses and the prophets, neither would they be persuaded though one rose from the dead. Now our Moses and our prophets, so far as the rights and privileges of American citizens are concerned, are the framers of the Declaration of American Independence. If the American people will not hear these, they will not be persuaded though one rose from the dead.⁴

1. Frederick Douglass, *The Frederick Douglass Papers, Series 1: Speeches, Debates, and Interviews*, ed. John W. Blassingame et al., 5 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979–92), 4:55. For more specific references (and further commentary), see David B. Gowler, *The Parables after Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 173–78.

2. Douglass, *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, 4:73–74)..

3. Douglass, *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, 5:387.

4. Douglass, *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, 5:384.

8.54

Luke 18:15–17—“Suffer the Little Children”

A story told in all three Synoptic Gospels portrays Jesus scolding his disciples when they try to turn back people who want to bring their children to him for blessings. In the KJV, the memorable expression used in Jesus’s response was “Suffer the little children to come unto me” (in Elizabethan English, the word *suffer* meant “permit” or “allow”).

Text of the Gospel Stories in King James Version

Matthew 19:13–15	Mark 10:13–16	Luke 18:15–17
<p>Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put <i>his</i> hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them.</p> <p>But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.</p> <p>And he laid <i>his</i> hands on them, and departed thence.</p>	<p>And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and <i>his</i> disciples rebuked those that brought <i>them</i>.</p> <p>But when Jesus saw <i>it</i>, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.</p> <p>Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.</p> <p>And he took them up in his arms, put <i>his</i> hands upon them, and blessed them.</p>	<p>And they brought unto him also infants, that he would touch them: but when <i>his</i> disciples saw <i>it</i>, they rebuked them.</p> <p>But Jesus called them <i>unto him</i>, and said, “Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.</p> <p>Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein.</p>

“Children Brought to Christ” by W. M. Hutchings (1850): The Bible story inspired a sentimental hymn written by a London printer, William Medlen Hutchings (1827–76):

When mothers of Salem¹ their children brought to Jesus,
The stern disciples drove them back and bade them to depart:
But Jesus saw them ere they fled and sweetly smiled and kindly
said,
“Suffer little children to come unto Me.”
“For I will receive them and fold them to My bosom:

I’ll be a shepherd to these lambs, O drive them not away;
For if their hearts to Me they give, they shall with Me in glory live:
Suffer little children to come unto Me.”
How kind was our Savior to bid these children welcome!

But there are many thousands who have never heard His Name;
The Bible they have never read, they know not that the Savior
said,
“Suffer little children to come unto Me.”
O soon may the heathen of every tribe and nation

Fulfill Thy blessèd Word and cast their idols all away!
O shine upon them from above and show Thyself a God of love,
Teach the little children to come unto Thee!

1. Salem = Jerusalem

9.0

John: Outline of Contents

- I. Introduction (1:1–51)
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 - G. Healing at pool of Beth-zatha and related discourse (5:1–47)
 - H. Feeding of five thousand and related incidents and discussions (6:1–71)
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- N. Raising of Lazarus from the dead (11:1–44)
- O. Condemnation of Jesus (11:45–57)
- P. Triumphal entry and related events (12:1–50)
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 - D. Jesus's final prayer (17:1–26)
 - E. The passion narrative: Jesus's arrest, trial, crucifixion, and burial (18:1–19:42)
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- IV. Appendix: Jesus's appearance by Sea of Galilee to Peter and others (21:1–25)

Courtesy of *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, ed. Mark Allan Powell (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 480.

9.1

Content Summary: Expanded Overview of the Gospel of John

A poetic prologue introduces Jesus as the Word of God made flesh.
(1:1–18)

John the Baptist testifies that, as one sent to prepare the way, he saw the Spirit descend upon Jesus, who is the Son of God and “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” (1:19–34)

Two of John’s disciples become followers of Jesus. One is Andrew, who brings his brother Simon to Jesus as well. Jesus gives Simon a new name: “Cephas” (or “Peter”). (1:35–42)

Jesus calls Philip to follow him, and Philip brings Nathanael, who is initially hesitant, asking, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip says, “Come and see.” (1:43–51)

Jesus changes water into wine at a wedding in Cana. (2:1–12)

Jesus expels vendors and animals from the Jerusalem temple, overturning tables and claiming that the vendors have turned his Father’s house into a marketplace. He says, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up”—an oblique reference to his own body. (2:13–25)

Nicodemus, a leading Pharisee, comes to Jesus at night for conversation. Jesus speaks to him about the need to be “born

again” (or “from above”) and about how “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son.” (3:1–21)

While Jesus and his disciples are baptizing in the Judean countryside, John the Baptist has a conversation with a Jew, testifying to Jesus as the Messiah, bridegroom, and Son of God. (3:22–36)

Jesus has a conversation with a Samaritan woman at a well, speaking of “living water” and of true worship. He discloses knowledge of her private life and then spends two days with others who hear about him from the woman. Many Samaritans come to believe that he is “the Savior of the world.” (4:1–42)

A royal official asks Jesus to come to Capernaum to heal his son, but Jesus performs the healing from a distance, simply by speaking the word. (4:43–54)

On a Sabbath day, Jesus heals a crippled man by the Pool of Bethesda. The Jews begin persecuting him for healing on the Sabbath and for speaking of God in a way that seemed to make himself equal to God. (5:1–18)

Jesus speaks to the Jews further of his unique relationship with the Father and claims to have supporting testimony from John the Baptist and from Moses. (5:19–47)

Jesus feeds over five thousand people with five loaves of bread and two fish provided by a boy. He then flees the scene because the crowd wants to force him to be their king. (6:1–15)

Jesus walks on water to join his disciples in a boat; the boat then immediately arrives at its destination. (6:16–21)

The multitude fed by Jesus follows him to Capernaum, and he speaks to them about the “living bread” that comes down from heaven; to have this bread, they must eat his flesh and drink his blood. (6:22–59)

Jesus’s disciples are confounded by his teaching, and some of them turn away, but Simon Peter says, “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life.” (6:60–71)

Jesus goes to the Festival of Booths in secret, but then he teaches publicly in the temple and engages in extended disputation with Jews concerning his claims and origin. (7:1–52)

Jesus is questioned by a group of scribes and Pharisees about their intention to stone an adulterous woman; he responds by suggesting that the one who is without sin should cast the first stone. (7:53–8:11)

Jesus continues his disputation with the Jews, claiming to be the light of the world and to be “not of this world.” Those who continue in his words will know the truth and be made free, but the Jews who reject him are children of the devil. (8:12–59)

On a Sabbath day, Jesus, using mud made from dirt and his saliva, heals a man who had been born blind. The Jews interrogate the man's parents and then the man himself, who comes to believe in Jesus as the Son of Man. (9:1–41)

Jesus describes himself as the good shepherd who has come to bring abundant life. (10:1–18)

Jesus continues to argue with the Jews, who are divided in their opinions about his identity and authority. (10:19–42)

Jesus visits the home of Mary and Martha in Bethany and raises their brother, Lazarus, from the dead. This miracle attracts so much attention that the high priest Caiphas says that Jesus must be put to death before the Romans hear about him and take action against the nation. (11:1–57)

Mary of Bethany anoints Jesus with costly perfume; she is criticized by Judas (who wanted to sell it and steal the money) but defended by Jesus. (12:1–8)

The chief priests decide to kill Lazarus as well as Jesus, because so many Jews are believing in Jesus on account of his having raised Lazarus from the dead. (12:9–11)

Jesus rides into Jerusalem seated on a donkey, while cheering crowds meet him with palm branches. (12:12–19)

Some Greeks want to see Jesus, and they approach Philip about this. (12:20–22)

Jesus speaks at length about his mission and impending death;

when he prays, “Father, glorify your name,” a voice like thunder speaks from heaven, declaring, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” (12:23–50)

Jesus and his disciples gather for a final supper, and he washes their feet. (13:1–17)

Jesus predicts that Judas will betray him, and Satan enters into Judas when Jesus gives him a piece of bread. (13:18–30)

Jesus offers an extended farewell discourse to his disciples (13:31–16:33). Among other things:

- He speaks of his death as glorification.
- He gives his followers a new commandment to “love one another.”
- He says that he goes to prepare dwelling places for them in his Father’s house.
- He says that he and the Father are one; he is the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except by him.
- He promises that the Holy Spirit will come as a helper, advocate, and teacher.
- He speaks of his disciples continuing to abide in him like branches on a vine.

- He describes his own origin as being in God and describes his death as a return to the Father, who sent him into this world.

Jesus offers an extended prayer to the Father for his followers, emphasizing a plea that they might be one, just as he and the Father are one. (17:1–26)

Betrayed by Judas, Jesus is arrested and questioned by Annas, father-in-law of Caiaphas, the current high priest; meanwhile, Peter denies Jesus three times. (18:1–27)

Jesus is turned over to Pilate, who asks about the nature of his kingdom and poses the philosophical conundrum: “What is truth?” The Jews are persistent in demanding Jesus’s crucifixion, and Pilate yields to their demands. (18:28–19:16)

Jesus carries his own cross to Golgotha and is crucified. While on the cross, he entrusts the care of his mother to the “beloved disciple”; he also says, “I am thirsty,” in order to fulfill Scripture, and then he dies with the words “It is finished.” (19:17–30)

A soldier pierces Jesus’s side with a spear, and water and blood flow out. (19:31–37)

Joseph of Arimathea, a secret disciple of Jesus, and Nicodemus, who had come to Jesus at night, receive the body of Jesus and place it in a tomb. (19:38–42)

On the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene finds the stone rolled away from the tomb. Peter and the “beloved disciple” inspect the tomb and find it empty. Then Jesus appears to Mary, who at first mistakes him for the gardener. (20:1–18)

Jesus appears to ten of his disciples in a locked room and commissions them with the spiritual authority to forgive or retain sins. Thomas is absent, and he refuses to believe the others. (20:19–25)

A week later, Jesus appears to all eleven disciples, and Thomas exclaims, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus says, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” (20:26–29)

John’s Gospel initially closes with an affirmation that Jesus did many things not written in the book, but these that have been written are meant to help the reader come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and so to have life. (20:30–31)

An epilogue relates a story of a third appearance to the disciples. Jesus comes to a group of disciples in Galilee, and they catch a miraculous haul of 153 fish. (21:1–14)

After breakfast, Jesus asks Peter three times, “Do you love me?” and he responds to Peter’s affirmative answer by saying, “Feed my sheep.” (21:15–17)

Jesus predicts how Peter will die (by crucifixion); Peter asks about the “beloved disciple,” and a misinterpretation of Jesus’s answer

leads to a rumor in the church that the “beloved disciple” will continue to live until Jesus returns. (21:18–23)

John’s Gospel finally closes with a notation that this “beloved disciple” is the one who wrote down the testimony to Jesus contained within the book. (21:24–25)

9.2

John in the Revised Common Lectionary

Text	Content	Series	Liturgical Occasion	Calendar Date
1:1–14	Logos Hymn	A, B, C	Christmas Day	Dec 25
1:(1–9) 10–18	Logos Hymn	A, B, C	Christmas 2	2 Sundays after Dec. 25
1:6–8, 19–28	Witness of John the Baptist	B	Advent 3	2 Sundays before Dec. 25
1:29–42	Witness of John the Baptist	A	Epiphany 2	Jan. 14–20
1:43–51	Call of Disciples	B	Epiphany 2	Jan. 14–20
2:1–11	Wedding at Cana	C	Epiphany 2	Jan. 14–20
2:13–22	Cleansing of temple	B	Lent 3	4 Sundays before Easter
3:1–17	Nicodemus and Jesus	A	Lent 2	5 Sundays before Easter
3:1–17	Nicodemus and Jesus	B	Holy Trinity	9 Sundays after Easter
3:14–21	Jesus and Nicodemus	B	Lent 4	3 Sundays before Easter
4:5–42	Woman at well	A	Lent 3	4 Sundays before Easter
5:1–9	Healing at Beth-zatha pool	C	Easter 6	5 Sundays after Easter
6:1–21	Feeding five thousand, walking on water	B	Lectionary 17	July 24–30
6:24–35	Teaching on bread of life	B	Lectionary 18	July 31–Aug. 6
6:35, 41–51	Teaching on bread of life	B	Lectionary 19	Aug. 7–13
6:51–58	Teaching on bread of life	B	Lectionary 20	Aug. 14–20
6:56–59	Teaching on bread of life	B	Lectionary 21	Aug. 21–27
9:1–41	Healing of man born blind	A	Lent 4	3 Sundays before Easter
10:1–10	Jesus the good shepherd	A	Easter 4	3 Sundays after Easter
10:11–18	Jesus the good	B	Easter 4	3 Sundays after

	shepherd			Easter
10:22–30	Jesus’s sheep are secure	C	Easter 4	3 Sundays after Easter
11:1–45	Raising of Lazarus	A	Lent 5	2 Sundays before Easter
11:32–44	Raising of Lazarus	B	All Saints’ Sunday	Nov. 1
12:1–8	Anointing at Bethany	C	Lent 5	2 Sundays before Easter
12:20–33	Jesus glorifies the Father	B	Lent 5	2 Sundays before Easter
13:1–17, 31b–35	Washing the disciples’ feet	A, B, C	Maundy Thursday	Thursday before Easter
13:31–35	New commandment	C	Easter 5	4 Sundays after Easter
14:1–14	Jesus the way to the Father	A	Easter 5	4 Sundays after Easter
14:8–17 (25–27)	Jesus will send the Paraclete	C	Pentecost	7 Sundays after Easter
14:15–21	Jesus will send the Paraclete	A	Easter 6	5 Sundays after Easter
14:23–29	Jesus with his followers	C	Easter 6	5 Sundays after Easter
15:1–8	Jesus the true vine	B	Easter 5	4 Sundays after Easter
15:9–17	Love one another	B	Easter 6	5 Sundays after Easter
15:26–27; 16:4b–15	Jesus will send the Spirit	B	Pentecost	8 Sundays after Easter
16:12–15	Spirit guides into all truth	C	Holy Trinity	9 Sundays after Easter
17:1–11	Jesus’s “high priestly” prayer	A	Easter 7	6 Sundays after Easter
17:6–19	Jesus’s “high priestly” prayer	B	Easter 7	6 Sundays after Easter
17:20–26	Jesus’s “high priestly” prayer	C	Easter 7	6 Sundays after Easter
18:1–19:42	Passion of Jesus	A, B, C	Good Friday	Friday before Easter
18:33–37	Jesus before Pilate	B	Christ the King	Nov. 20–26
20:1–18	Resurrection of Jesus	A, B, C	Easter Day	Easter
20:19–23	Jesus gives disciples the Spirit	A	Pentecost	7 Sundays after Easter
20:19–31	Jesus appears	A, B,	Easter 2	1 Sunday after

	to Thomas	C		Easter
21:1–19	Catch of fish; words to Peter	C	Easter 3	2 Sundays after Easter

9.3

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9.4

Distinctive Characteristics of John's Gospel

A. John's Gospel begins with a hymnic prologue that presents Jesus as the preexistent Logos made flesh (1:1–18).

B. John's Gospel appears to be related in some way to the three Johannine Epistles.

- It sometimes has been thought that they might have the same author or come from the same community. Tradition has also connected John's Gospel with the book of Revelation, whose author is identified as "John" (Rev. 1:4), but this connection is not widely accepted by scholars today.

C. John's Gospel claims to be based on the testimony of someone called the "beloved disciple" (19:35; 21:20–24).

- He leans on Jesus's chest at the Last Supper (13:23) and is entrusted with the care of Jesus's mother (19:26–27). Numerous texts also compare this disciple's experiences with those of Peter (13:24–25; 18:15–16; 20:4, 8; 21:7, 21–23).
- Church tradition often has identified this disciple with John the son of Zebedee.

D. John's Gospel shows signs of having been edited.

The story of the woman caught in adultery (7:53–8:11) is missing in some manuscripts and is located at different

places in John's Gospel in others. (In some authorities the story is found in the Gospel of Luke instead of the Gospel of John.)

- Some passages don't make sense in present context:

“You look for an opportunity to kill me” (8:37) (addressed to the Jews who believe in him [8:31])

“Mary was the one who anointed the Lord” (11:2) (but not until 12:3)

- Jesus says, “Rise, let us be on our way” (14:31) (but then he continues talking for two more chapters).
- Chapter 21 appears to be an addition, and 20:30–31 sounds like it was intended to be an ending.
- References to enumerated signs (e.g., 2:11; 4:54) may derive from an earlier source (a “signs” Gospel that could have concluded with 20:30–31).

E. Ninety percent of the content in John's Gospel is unparalleled, and stories in John that are found elsewhere are told quite differently from the parallels.

- feeding of five thousand (featuring a boy with bread and fish and the “Bread of Life” speech) (6:1–15)
- anointing at Bethany (by Mary, sister of Martha, rather than by an unnamed woman) (12:1–8)

- crucifixion (with three unparalleled words from the cross)
(19:17–37)

F. John appears to know numerous minor details not reported by the other Gospels (especially with regard to the passion narrative).

- name of slave whose ear was severed: Malchus (18:10)
- name of disciple who struck Malchus: Simon Peter (18:10)
- name of high priest's father-in-law: Annas (18:13)

G. John's Gospel presents a very different chronology for Jesus's ministry than that of the other Gospels.

- References to three Passovers indicate Jesus's ministry lasts three years (2:13; 6:4; 11:55).
- Jesus travels back and forth between Galilee and Judea.
- Jesus's ministry overlaps with that of John the Baptist (3:22–24; cf. Matt. 4:12; Mark 1:14).
- Events: temple cleansing occurs at beginning of ministry (2:14–22; cf. Matt. 21:12–13; Mark 11:15–19; Luke 19:45–46); miraculous catch of fish occurs after Easter (21:1–11; cf. Luke 5:4–11).
- Jesus's death takes place on the day before the Passover meal (18:28; 19:13–14, 31) rather than on the day after (cf. Matt. 26:17; Mark 14:12; Luke 22:7).

H. The content and style of Jesus’s teaching in John’s Gospel is different from the other Gospels.

- *Content*: instead of talking about the kingdom of God or the Mosaic law, Jesus talks primarily about himself (“He reveals that he is the Revealer”¹)
- *Style*: instead of using parables and proverbial aphorisms, Jesus delivers long philosophical discourses (5:19–47; 6:25–70; 7:14–52; 8:12–59; 10:1–18, 22–39; 12:23–36; 14:1–16:33).

I. In John’s Gospel, the miracles of Jesus are depicted as signs (2:11; 4:54; 6:2, 14; 12:18) that are intended to lead people to believe (20:30).

- In the other Gospels, signs are associated with false prophets, and Jesus refuses to work them (e.g., Matt. 12:38–39; 16:1–4; 24:24). Even in John, their effectiveness as signs is mixed: some people believe because of the signs (2:23; 6:2, 14; cf. 20:30), while others do not (11:47; 12:37; cf. 4:48).

J. Misunderstanding is a common motif in John’s Gospel.

- “this temple” (2:19–22)
- “born from above” (3:3–5)
- “living water” (4:10–15)
- “sleep” (11:11–14)

- See also 4:31–34; 6:32–35, 51–52; 7:33–36; 8:21–22, 31–33, 51–53.

K. John’s Gospel makes abundant use of symbolism.

- See, for example, the metaphorical “I am” sayings (6:35, 51; 8:12; 9:5; 10:7, 9, 11, 14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1, 5).
- In some cases, it is not clear whether a matter has symbolic meaning or not (e.g., the untorn net and 153 fish of 21:11).

L. John’s Gospel identifies Jesus’s opponents as “the Jews,” a term that is not widely used in the other Gospels (only Matt. 28:15 and Mark 7:3).

- Note also John’s references to people who believe in Jesus being expelled from the synagogue (9:22; 12:42; 16:2).

M. John’s Gospel emphasizes love for one another as the single new commandment of Jesus and as the distinctive mark of his followers (13:34–35).

- Jesus does not reinterpret the law in detail as he does in the other Gospels (e.g., Matt. 5:17–6:18).
- Jesus does not speak of love for neighbors or for enemies as he does in the other Gospels (e.g., Luke 6:27–31; 10:25–37).

N. John’s Gospel emphasizes the role of the Spirit, the Paraclete.

- promised by Jesus (7:37–39; 14:16–17)

- given after the resurrection (20:22)
- enables believers to continue Jesus's works (14:12)
- teaches and reveals truth (14:25–26; 16:13)
- In some sense, the coming of the Spirit is a “second coming” of Jesus (14:15–20).

O. John's Gospel has its own special vocabulary for “salvation.”

- As in the other Gospels, salvation can be described as entering God's kingdom (3:3–5).
- More often, it is described as:
 - having “life” or “eternal life” (3:14–17, 36; 5:39–40; 10:10; 20:31; cf. 1 John 5:12)
 - knowing “the truth” (8:32; cf. 1:14, 17; 3:21; 5:33; 16:13; 17:17–19; 18:37); compare with John 14:6: “I am the way, the truth, and the life”

P. John's Gospel presents Jesus's crucifixion as his exaltation.

- Three passages refer to Jesus being “lifted up” (3:14; 8:28; 12:32–34). These references parallel the three “passion predictions” found in each of the other Gospels (Matt. 16:21; 17:22–23; 20:17–19; Mark 8:31–32; 9:31; 10:33–34; Luke 9:22, 44; 18:31–33).

1. Rudolph Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Kendrick Grobel, 2 vols. (New York: Scribner's, 1951, 1955), 2:66.

9.5

The Beloved Disciple in John's Gospel (Box 9.3)

- leans on Jesus's chest at the Last Supper (13:23)
- intermediary between Peter and Jesus (13:24–25)
- gains admittance for Peter to Pilate's court (18:15–16)
- entrusted with care of Jesus's mother (19:26–27)
- witness to blood and water flowing from Jesus's side (19:34–35)
- outruns Peter to the tomb on Easter morning (20:4)
- first to believe in the resurrection (20:8)
- identifies the risen Jesus for Peter (21:7)
- his fate should not be a matter of concern for Peter (21:21–23)
- wrote down these things; his testimony is true (21:24; cf. 19:35)

9.6

Two Books in One (Box 9.1)

John's Gospel divides neatly into two parts:

- The Book of Signs (1:19–12:50)
- The Book of Glory (13:1–20:31)

The first part is called the “Book of Signs” because it relates stories of remarkable things Jesus did, which are repeatedly called “signs.”

The word “sign” (*sēmeion*) is used sixteen times in this part of John's Gospel, and then it is not used again until the end (20:30) in a passage that scholars think might have originally come at the end of chapter 12, as a conclusion to John's Book of Signs.

The second part of John's Gospel is called the “Book of Glory” because it deals with the last week of Jesus's life, when, in the words of this Gospel, the time for Jesus to be “glorified” had come (17:1; cf. 13:1; see also 7:39; 12:16, 23–24).

John's Gospel also opens with a prologue (1:1–18) and closes with an epilogue (21:1–25).

9.7

Comparison of John and the Synoptic Gospels

John's Gospel obviously differs from the three Synoptic Gospels with regard to content. John tells many stories that the Synoptic Gospels do not tell; conversely, John lacks many well-known stories that the Synoptic Gospels do tell. All told, about 90 percent of the material in John's Gospel is without parallel in the other Gospels. But John also differs from the Synoptic Gospels in other ways.

Chronology

Certain events occur at radically different times: the cleansing of the temple comes at the beginning (2:13–22) rather than at the end (cf. Mark 11:15–19); the miraculous catch of fish comes at the end (21:1–11) rather than at the beginning (cf. Luke 5:4–11). The chronology of Jesus's crucifixion is also slightly different: Jesus is crucified on the day before Passover (18:28; 19:13–14, 31) rather than on the day after he and his disciples eat the Passover meal (cf. Matt. 26:17; Mark 14:12; Luke 22:7). In a broader sense, the mention of three Passovers in this Gospel gives the impression that Jesus's public ministry was conducted over a period of three years (see 2:13; 6:4; 11:55); the other Gospels give no indication of how long Jesus's ministry lasted, but apart from the information in John, we probably would have surmised that it was a much shorter time, probably less than a year. Furthermore, in John's Gospel, Jesus's ministry

overlaps with that of John the Baptist (3:22–24), which is not the impression that we would have received from the other Gospels (cf. Matt. 4:12–17; Mark 1:14).

Geography

The focus of John’s Gospel is different geographically from that of the other Gospels. In the Synoptic Gospels, the adult Jesus confines himself mostly to Galilee and surrounding territories, until he embarks on one fateful journey to Jerusalem, where he is crucified. John’s Gospel narrates a largely Judean ministry: Jesus visits Jerusalem twice before the end of chapter 7, and chapters 8–20 are all set in Judea.

The Style of Jesus’s Teaching

In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus’s teaching is marked by parables, proverbs, beatitudes, and other short, pithy sayings. In John’s Gospel, Jesus delivers long, philosophical discourses (5:19–47; 6:25–70; 7:14–52; 8:12–59; 10:1–18, 22–39; 12:23–46; 14:1–16:33). These speeches, furthermore, do not consist of numerous individual passages that could have circulated independently; rather, they tend to focus on single themes that are developed at length.

The Focus of Jesus’s Teaching

The Synoptic Gospels summarize the content of Jesus’s proclamation as “the good news of the kingdom of God” (see, e.g.,

Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:14–15), and indeed most of his teaching in those Gospels seems to be about the nature of God’s kingdom and the life expected of those who enter God’s kingdom. In John, Jesus talks mostly about himself: he talks about his identity as the one who comes to reveal the Father and about what it means for people to believe in him, love him, obey him, and abide in him. Far from seeking to keep his identity or status a secret (cf. Mark 1:23–25, 34, 43–44; 3:11–12; 5:43; 7:36; 8:26, 30; 9:9), he openly announces who he is (4:26; 5:18; 6:35–51; 8:12–30; cf. 7:1–29) and reflects at length on the significance of being in a relationship with him (and with God through him).

Literary Features

John’s Gospel is also different from the Synoptics in basic linguistic ways. It is written in a style of Greek that retains Semitic syntax, probably reflecting the Palestinian roots of the apostles and early Christian missionaries (as opposed to the less Semitic Greek employed by Diaspora Jews). John also displays a strong tendency to use dualistic categories, such as “above and below” (3:31; 8:23), “light and darkness” (1:5; 3:19; 8:12; 12:35, 46), “truth and lies” (8:44–45). Overall, the language of John’s Gospel (and of Jesus in that Gospel) has been described as rhythmic, poetic, mystical, philosophical, and mysterious. Two related features contribute to this impression: (1) John’s Gospel is heavily *symbolic*, using metaphors to describe Jesus in terms that are never absolutely defined (see,

e.g., 6:35; 8:12; 10:7, 11; 15:1); and (2) John's Gospel employs the literary device of *misunderstanding*, whereby characters in the story misconstrue something that Jesus says (e.g., 2:19–22; 3:3–5; 11:12–14) and the narrator or Jesus himself needs to clarify the matter (unless the correct meaning is assumed to be obvious).

9.8

Material Not Found in John's Gospel (Box 9.6)

John's Gospel is notable for its lack of material that is very familiar in the other Gospels:

- no stories of Jesus's birth
- no mention of Jesus's baptism
- nothing about Jesus being tempted or tested by Satan
- no mention of Jesus eating with tax collectors and sinners
- no transfiguration of Jesus
- no parables
- no exorcisms
- no condemnations of the rich or words about helping the poor
- nothing about loving one's neighbor (or one's enemy)
- no call for people to repent (from either John the Baptist or Jesus)
- no call for disciples to deny themselves or renounce their possessions
- no predictions of Jerusalem's downfall (but cf. 2:19–22)
- no mention of Jesus instituting the Lord's Supper (but cf. 6:53–56)
- almost no mention of the kingdom of God (only in 3:3–5; but cf. 18:36)

- almost no references to a second coming (just once: 21:22–23; usually, 14:3, 18, 28 are read as Jesus coming for individuals at the hour of their death)

9.9

Some Stories about Jesus Unique to John's Gospel (Box 9.5)

- calling of Andrew, Philip, and Nathanael (1:35–51)
- changing of water into wine at Cana (2:1–12)
- conversation with Nicodemus (3:1–21)
- encounter with a Samaritan woman at a well (4:1–42)
- healing of a crippled man at Pool of Beth-zatha (5:1–18)
- rescue of an adulterous woman from stoning (7:53–8:11)
- healing of a man born blind (9:1–41)
- raising of Lazarus (11:1–44)
- washing of disciples' feet (13:1–20)
- prayer for believers to be united (17:1–26)
- resurrection appearance to Thomas (20:24–29)

9.10

Symbolism in the Gospel of John

The Gospel of John makes abundant use of symbolism. For instance, John states that Jesus is the “Lamb of God” (1:29, 36) and is the “bridegroom” (3:29).

Seven Metaphorical “I Am” Sayings

Jesus describes himself repeatedly with the words “I am,” which recall God’s self-designation in Exodus 3:14; Deuteronomy 32:39; Isaiah 48:12.

“I am the bread of life”; “I am the living bread” (6:35, 51)

“I am the light of the world” (8:12; 9:5)

“I am the gate” (10:7, 9)

“I am the good shepherd” (10:11, 14)

“I am the resurrection and the life” (11:25)

“I am the way, the truth, and the life” (14:6)

“I am the true vine” (15:1, 5)

See also 4:26; 6:20; 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19; 18:6—key verses that in the Greek text use the expression “I am” (*egō eimi*).

Sacramental Symbols?

There are no accounts in John's Gospel of Jesus being baptized or instituting the Eucharist, but the elements of water, bread, and wine are featured throughout the Gospel.

- water (3:5; 4:10–15; 5:2–7; 7:37–39; 9:7; 13:3–10; 19:34)
- bread (6:5–13, 28–58; 21:9–13)
- wine (2:1–10; 6:53–56)

Obscure Symbols

Are these matters symbolic, and if so, what do they symbolize?

- stone water jars (2:6)
- Lazarus's bandages (11:44)
- Jesus's towel (13:5)
- Jesus's seamless robe (19:23)
- hyssop branch (19:29)
- water and blood from Jesus's side (19:34–35)
- Jesus's grave clothes (20:5–7)
- 153 fish (21:11)
- untorn net (21:11)

9.11

Misunderstanding in the Gospel of John

When Jesus says “destroy this temple,” people think that he is talking about the temple in Jerusalem, not the temple of his body (2:19–22).

Nicodemus wonders how a person can reenter the womb in order to be born anew (3:3–5).

Jesus speaks of “living water,” and a Samaritan woman thinks that there must be a running stream nearby (4:10–15).

Jesus says that his food is to do the will of God, and his disciples wonder who has been bringing him provisions (4:31–34).

Jesus speaks of himself as the bread from heaven, and people think that he is talking about the manna that Moses offered people in the wilderness (6:32–35).

Jesus speaks of people eating his flesh, and they think that he is advocating some bizarre form of cannibalism (6:51–52).

Jesus speaks of the time when he will go where no one can find him (i.e., to heaven), and people think that he is planning to hide out in the Diaspora (7:33–36).

Jesus says that he is going where no one can follow him, and people think that he is planning to commit suicide (8:21–22).

Jesus says, “The truth will set you free,” and people think that he is talking about emancipation from literal slavery (8:31–33).

Jesus says that those who keep his word will never see death, and people think that he means that they will never physically die (8:51–53).

Jesus says that his friend Lazarus has fallen asleep (i.e., died), and his disciples think that Lazarus is getting some healthy rest (11:12).

9.12

The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of John

Theme: Jesus Is in Control

Jesus chooses Judas, knowing he will betray him (6:70–71; 13:27–30).

Jesus claims no one can take his life, but he will freely lay it down, knowing he can take it up again (10:17–18).

Satan has no power over Jesus (14:30).

Soldiers have no power over Jesus—they fall down at his word (18:6).

Pilate has no power over Jesus, save that which is allowed him (19:10–11).

Theme: Jesus's Death Is His Glorification

Jesus (as the Word) was in the beginning with God and was God (1:1–2).

Jesus comes to earth as the Word made flesh to dwell among us (1:14).

Even while on earth, Jesus and the Father are one (14:8–10).

Jesus's death is the hour when he departs this world and goes to the Father (13:1).

Through death, Jesus returns to his preexistent state of glory (17:5).

Theme: Jesus's Death Is a Sacrifice

Jesus is called the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (1:29).

Jesus is condemned to die at noon on Passover, the time when the Passover lamb is slain (19:14).

Theme: Jesus's Death Is an Exaltation and Victory

Jesus refers to his death three times as his being “lifted up” (3:14; 8:28; 12:31–32).

At his death Jesus cries, “It is finished!” (19:30), a claim to have accomplished what he intended to do.

9.13

Caiaphas

Joseph Caiaphas (pronounced kay´uh-fuhs) was the son-in-law and eventual successor of the Jewish high priest Annas. He is thought to have assumed this position in 18 CE under the Roman governor Valerius Gratus and to have held it until he was deposed around 36 or 37 by Vitellius, Pontius Pilate’s successor. He would, accordingly, appear to have been the high priest at the time of the trial of Jesus (Matt. 26:3, 57; John 18:13, 24), although Luke 3:2 and Acts 4:6 suggest a more complicated scenario.

John’s Gospel ascribes to Caiaphas the judgment regarding Jesus that it would be “better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed” (11:50); the author of John’s Gospel regards this judgment as an ironic prophecy, by which the high priest (unwittingly) declares that Jesus’s death would be for the nation (and for all children of God; cf. 11:51–52).

The discovery of a first-century family tomb in the Peace Forest outside Jerusalem in 1990 yielded a dozen stone ossuaries containing the remains of sixty-three individuals. The most elaborately decorated of the ossuaries is inscribed twice with the name “Yehoseph bar Kayafa” (Aramaic for “Joseph son of Caiaphas”). It contained the bones of four children, an adult woman,

and a man of about sixty. Many scholars believe that the bones of the adult male are in fact those of the high priest Caiaphas.

9.14

Nicodemus

Nicodemus (pronounced nik'uh-dee'muhs) was a Pharisee, a teacher of Israel, and a ruler of the Jews as described in the Gospel of John. Nicodemus comes to Jesus by night and engages him in conversation about the need to be born again (or “from above”), about God’s love for the world, and about Jesus’s own unique role as the Son of God (3:1–21). Nicodemus is later presented as defending Jesus, objecting that some of his fellow Pharisees are judging him without allowing him a fair hearing (7:50–52). After the crucifixion, he appears with Joseph of Arimathea, bringing a hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes to wrap Jesus’s body in spices and prepare it for entombment (19:39). Mentioned only in the Fourth Gospel, Nicodemus seems to be presented in that Gospel as the personification of a learned Jewish constituency that might be well disposed toward Jesus but did not understand him adequately, or, at least, did not feel prepared to confess him publicly as the Christ.

9.15

The Apostle John in the New Testament (Box 9.2)

Christian tradition identifies the “beloved disciple,” whose testimony is incorporated into the fourth New Testament Gospel, as John the son of Zebedee, one of Jesus’s original twelve disciples. What do we know about this person from other New Testament writings?

- John and his brother James were among the first disciples called by Jesus. They were fishermen who left their nets and their father, Zebedee, when Jesus called them to follow him (Mark 1:19–20).
- Along with his brother James and the disciple Peter, John seems to have belonged to an inner circle among Jesus’s followers. The trio of Peter, James, and John are invited to accompany Jesus when he raises Jairus’s daughter from the dead (Mark 5:37), when he is transfigured on a mountaintop (Mark 9:2), and when he prays in Gethsemane (Mark 14:33). There is also an episode in which the three of them are said to question Jesus privately (Mark 13:3).
- James and John bore the nickname “Boanerges,” meaning “sons of thunder” (Mark 3:17), and their headstrong ways sometimes got them in trouble with Jesus or the other disciples. In one instance they ask Jesus to guarantee them the two best seats in glory (Mark 10:35–41), and in another

they offer to call down fire from heaven to destroy a Samaritan village that has refused hospitality to Jesus (Luke 9:51–55).

- John's brother (James) was the first of the twelve apostles to die as a martyr (Acts 12:2), and John went on to become a prominent missionary in the early church. He is specifically mentioned as testifying boldly before Jewish leaders in Jerusalem (see Acts 3:1–11; 4:1, 13, 19–20) and as a key missionary worker among the Samaritans (Acts 8:14–25). He became known as “a pillar of the church,” one of three people whom the apostle Paul regarded as the key leaders of the Christian movement (Gal. 2:9).

9.16

Three Persons Named John?

Many scholars identify three individuals named John in early Christianity, all of whom are associated with different New Testament writings.

John the apostle (the son of Zebedee): He and his brother James were called to be among Jesus's first disciples (Mark 1:19–20). He ministered alongside Peter (Acts 3–4) and came to be known as a pillar of the church (Gal. 2:9). Some people believe he may be “the disciple whom Jesus loved,” whose testimony is incorporated into the Gospel of John (John 21:24).

John the elder (author of the three epistles?): We hear of this person in writings from the early church, including Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History*. He is said to have belonged to the same community as John the apostle and to have been the apostle's disciple (such that the two were often confused by later generations). He is probably the “elder” responsible for at least two of the Johannine epistles (2 John 1:1; 3 John 1:1). Most scholars think he also wrote the first of those letters (1 John), which is officially anonymous. He may have served as the editor or final author of the Gospel of John.

John the seer (visionary author of Revelation): We know nothing about this person except what he tells us, that he wrote the book of

Revelation while in exile on the island of Patmos (Rev. 1:1, 9).

Though he is often identified with the two persons mentioned above, most scholars think he was probably a completely different individual who just happened to have the same name.

For a contrasting view, see 30.13 “Only One John: The Apostle Who Wrote Five Books.”

9.17

An Inner Circle: Peter, James, and John

Peter, James and John are often said to have formed an “inner circle” among Jesus’s followers. The trio of Peter, James, and John

- go into the room with Jesus when he raises Jairus’s daughter from the dead (Mark 5:37)
- accompany Jesus when he is transfigured on a mountaintop (Mark 9:2)
- question Jesus privately about signs of the end times (Mark 13:3)
- go apart from the others with Jesus to pray in the garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:33)

Saint Jerome (ca. 347–420) hazarded a guess as to why three disciples stood out from the larger group of twelve:

Someone may wonder or ask: Why are these three apostles always chosen and the others sent away? Even when he was transfigured on the mountain, these three were with him. Yes, these three were chosen: Peter, James and John. But why only three?

First there is the mystery of the Trinity embedded in this number, a number sacred in itself.

Second, according to Moses, Jacob set three peeled branches in the watering troughs (Gen. 30:38).

Finally, it is written: "A three-ply cord is not easily broken" (Eccles. 4:12).

Peter is chosen as one upon whom the church would be built.

James is the first of the apostles to be crowned with martyrdom.

John is the beloved disciple whose love prefigures the state of virginity. (Homily 77.49)

9.18

Possible Sources for John's Gospel (Box 9.4)

- a “Signs Gospel” that recorded seven or eight miracle stories (2:1–12; 4:46–54; 5:1–9; 6:1–13; 9:1–7; 11:1–44; 21:1–6; maybe 6:15–25) and may have included an account of the passion and resurrection
- a collection of remembrances of one called the “beloved disciple,” dealing mostly with the last week of Jesus’s life
- a body of material underlying the great discourses of Jesus, possibly sermons by the beloved disciple or another prominent member of the community

9.19

Competition among the Pillars?

Certain passages in John's Gospel signal what could be competitive notes.

The Beloved Disciple and Peter. The beloved disciple is portrayed as closer to Jesus than Peter (13:23–25) and as quicker than Peter in getting to the tomb on Easter morning (20:4), coming to faith (20:8), and recognizing the risen Lord when he appears (21:7).

The Beloved Disciple and James. The beloved disciple is entrusted with the care of Jesus's mother when Jesus says from the cross, "Woman, here is your son" (19:26–27). But typically, that responsibility would have fallen to Jesus's oldest brother, James. Jesus's word from the cross characterizes the beloved disciple as "a brother of Jesus" also and effectively promotes him ahead of James in terms of familial authority.

Notably, the apostle Paul maintains that there were three "pillars" in the early church (Gal. 2:19): the disciple Peter, James the brother of Jesus, and the disciple John, who most scholars would identify with the "beloved disciple" responsible for this Gospel.

These competitive tendencies may simply be instances of local pride: the community treasured stories that portrayed their founder in a prominent and favored light. But many scholars speculate that the community associated with this Gospel may have experienced some

tension with other Christian groups (ones associated with Peter or James). This might also explain the Gospel's strong emphasis on the need for Christians to love one another (13:24–35; 15:12, 17) and on Jesus's earnest plea for all of his followers to be one (17:20–23).

9.20

A Nazi Version of John's Gospel

The *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* (New York) published the following article on January 14, 1937:

A Nazified version of the Gospel According to St. John, modified to adapt the original to Nazi tenets and especially to portray the author of the Fourth Gospel, if not Christ himself, as anti-Semitic, has been published by a group of "German Christian" spokesmen in the Bremen area, according to a Berlin dispatch to the *Herald Tribune*.

The new Nazi adaptation, prepared with the collaboration of Dr. Heinz Weizmann, Evangelical Bishop of Bremen, at the Castle of Wartburg, where Martin Luther worked, is enough to make Luther turn over in his grave, said Ralph W. Barnes, the *Tribune* correspondent.

In the preface Bishop Weidemann says: "Lest sticklers become annoyed with us, we desire to help him who searches for truth. The German of the Third Reich must know what Christ, Whom the Jews nailed to the cross, means."

John lends itself especially to Nazi anti-Jewish purposes, since in it, more than in the other Gospels, the Jews appear as opponents of Christ. . . .

More than once the phrase "The Jews jeered and said," appears in the modified version, instead of "Then said the Jews," as in the

King James version and also in the German of the Luther Bible.

In the Nazi revision “Judenland” or Jewland replaces the “Judea” of the original, and this “Jewland” is carefully distinguished from the province of Galilee, where Christ preached.

An obvious effort has been made to distinguish, through modification in the text, between Christ and his disciples, on the one hand, and the Jews, on the other, and convey the impression that the former were not Jews. . . .

In several cases distinctly Jewish names, such as Elijah and Isaiah, are replaced by the term “prophets.”

In an alteration of Verses 31 and 32 of Chapter IV, an effort is made to convey the impression that Christ shared the “German Christians” contempt for the Old Testament as distinctly Jewish literature. In the King James version these verses read:

“Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written. He gave them bread from heaven to eat.

“Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven.”

The corresponding passage in the Bremen version reads:

“The Bible also reports that bread fell from heaven for our ancestors in the desert.

“Jesus replied, I tell you the truth these old stories to which you continually refer do not help you. My Father alone gives you true divine bread.”

The phrase, “Behold an Israelite indeed,” in Chapter I, Verse 47, becomes, “You are a true man of God among our people.”

In Chapter I, Verse 38, and elsewhere in the Gospel, the term “rabbi,” as applied to Christ, is rendered by the German equivalent for “master” [i.e., nomenclature for a non-Jewish teacher].

For more on this project, see:

Doris L. Bergen. *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996.

Ludwig Müller and Bishop Weidemann. *The Germanisation of the New Testament*. Foreword by H. C. Robbins. London: Friends of Europe, 1938.

9.21

John 1:51—Allusion to Jacob’s Ladder

In the first chapter of John’s Gospel Jesus tells the curious Nathanael, “Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man” (John 1:51).

The key to understanding this cryptic comment involves recognition that Jesus is making an allusion to the vision of a ladder that the Old Testament patriarch Jacob beheld in a dream: “And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it” (Gen 28:12).

That memorable image would inspire countless literary allusions, including in recent times, the rock songs “Stairway to Heaven” by Led Zeppelin and “Jacob’s Ladder” by Huey Lewis and the News. But nineteen hundred years before those compositions, the author of John’s Gospel portrayed Jesus as reimagining the image with himself as the ladder.

Theologians would be impressed. Augustine understood it to mean Christ was the pathway to salvation; Martin Luther took it as a symbol of the Incarnation; John Calvin read it as presenting Christ as the mediator between God and humanity.

And Charles Wesley (1707–88) composed a hymn:

What doth the ladder mean,
Sent down from the Most High?
Fasten'd to earth its foot is seen,
Its summit to the sky.
Lo, up and down the scale
The angels swiftly move
And God, the great Invisible
Himself appears above!

Jesus that ladder is,
Th' incarnate Deity,
Partaker of celestial bliss,
And human misery.
Sent from His high abode,
To sleeping mortals given,
He stands, and man unites to God
And earth connects to heaven.

9.22

John 3:2—Nicodemus

The third chapter of John’s Gospel begins with the words, “There was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night . . .” (John 3:1–2).

The story then goes on to relate a memorable conversation between Jesus and the teacher of Israel. Jesus speaks of the need to be “born again” (or “born from above”) in order to see the kingdom of God (3:3) and, eventually, the conversation culminates in one of the best-known verses in all of Scripture, John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”

Nicodemus makes a return appearance at the end of John’s Gospel, when along with Joseph of Arimathea he prepares Jesus’s body for entombment (John 19:38–42).

But the initial nighttime visit is what would attract the attention of many preachers, authors, and poets: most have taken the reference to “night” as fraught with symbolism, potentially suggestive of ignorance, cowardice, secrecy, desperation, spiritual blindness, or yearning.

An example of the numerous works inspired by this simple image is “The Night” by the Welsh poet Henry Vaughn (1621–95):

Through that pure virgin shrine,

1068

That sacred veil drawn o'er Thy glorious noon,
That men might look and live, as glowworms shine,
 And face the moon,
Wise Nicodemus saw such light
As made him know his God by night.

Most blest believer he!
Who in that land of darkness and blind eyes
Thy long-expected healing wings could see,
 When Thou didst rise!
And, what can never more be done,
Did at midnight speak with the Sun!

9.23

John 4:1–42—Woman at the Well

Edmond Rostand (1868–1918) was a French poet and dramatist. He is associated with neoromanticism, and may be best known for his plays *Cyrano de Bergerac* and *Les Romanesques* (which in 1960 was adapted into the long-running American musical, *The Fantasticks*).

Rostand also wrote and produced a play called *The Woman of Samaria*, based on the story in John 4:1–42. In this play, the woman is named Photine and her absent lover (the man she lives with after having had five husbands) is named Azriel.

Faye Pauli Whitaker offers this description of the nineteenth-century play:

Edmond Rostand's biblical drama *The Woman of Samaria*, first performed in 1897, reflects on the ancient significance of the well and the Jewish-Samaritan conflict as it opens with the phantoms of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The revolutionary rhetoric of a young Samaritan sustains the political concerns of the story. Photine, Rostand's heroine, approaches Christ at the well, singing songs of love from the Canticles. These songs continue through the play, though they gain symbolic meaning as her own awareness deepens from carnal to spiritual knowledge. Rostand makes little of Photine's moral history, though he does add the character of Azriel, Photine's sixth man, who is astonished when

this illiterate woman learns to expound Scripture like an ecstatic preacher. The play includes pageantry and Photine's exuberant singing. Even the otherwise crusty disciples eventually join in the celebration of love.¹

Text of John 4:1–42

Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard, “Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John”—although it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptized—he left Judea and started back to Galilee. But he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” The woman said to him, “Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?” Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will

never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.” The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.”

Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come back.” The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!” The woman said to him, “Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.” Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.” Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.”

Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, “What do you want?” or, “Why are you speaking with her?” Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, “Come and see a man who told me everything I have

ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" They left the city and were on their way to him.

Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something." But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?" Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. Do you not say, 'Four months more, then comes the harvest'? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world."

1. Faye Pauli Whitaker, "Woman at the Well," in *Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature*, ed. David Lyle Jeffrey (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 845.

9.24

John 5:2–9—Healing at Beth-zatha

John 5:2–9 describes the miraculous healing of a man at a pool that is variously called Bethesda (KJV) or Beth-za´tha (RSV) or Beth-zatha (NRSV).

Although there are some text-critical issues regarding which parts of the story were in the original Gospel manuscripts, the versions that became best known throughout church history tell of a marvelous pool in Jerusalem where an angel would periodically stir up the water in order to give it healing power:

Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches.

In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water.

For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had.

And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years.

When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole?

The impotent man answered him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me in the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me.

Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk.

And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the sabbath. (John 5:2–9 KJV)

“Wade in the Waters”: The reference in this story to the water being “troubled” (i.e., “stirred up”) would inspire one of the most famous Spirituals in the canon of American music:

Wade in the water . . .
Wade in the water, children . . .
Wade in the water . . .
God’s a-going to trouble the water.

Although the refrain of the song derives from the story in John, the verses relate the concept of “healing waters” to the story of the exodus (Exod. 14:19–29) and to the baptism of Jesus (Mark 1:9–11).

William Wordsworth (1780–1850): The English Romantic poet would compare the pool to the human heart:

Words that can soothe, more than they agitate;
Whose spirit, like the angel that went down
Into Bethesda’s pool, with healing virtue
Informs the fountain in the human breast
Which by the visitation was disturbed.

“Lines Suggested by a Portrait from the Pencil of F. Stone,” lines 124–28

Herman Melville (1819–91): The American writer best known for his novel *Moby Dick* compared the beggars around the docks at Liverpool to the sick who surrounded the healing pool in John’s Gospel. In his novel *Redburn*, the title character prays that “some angel might descend, and turn the waters of the docks into an elixir, that would heal all their woes, and make them, man and woman, healthy and whole as their ancestors, Adam and Eve, in the garden” (chapter 38).

Stephen King (1947–): The popular American author best known for horror-fiction created another dimension in his 2006 novel *Lisey’s Story* in which there is a body of water that will heal all injuries and diseases. Those possessed of a special gift or of secret knowledge can will themselves into this dimension and bathe in the healing waters—but there are rules, and things do not go well for those who break them!

Other authors have developed the imagery of John 5:2–9 in a more despairing tone.

Charlotte Brontë (1816–55) laments the angel’s delay:

Thousands lie round the pool,
weeping and despairing,
to see it, through slow years, stagnant.
Long are the times of Heaven:
the orbits of angel messengers

seem long to mortal vision.

Villete, chapter 17

African American poet **Arna Bontemps** (1902–73) sees delayed healing as a metaphor for the unfulfilled promise of racial equality:

The pool that once the angels troubled does not move.

No angel stirs it now, no Savior comes

with healing in His hands to raise the sick

And bid the lame man leap upon the ground.

“Nocturne at Bethesda,” lines 6–9

9.25

John 6:16–21—Jesus Walks on Water

The story of Jesus walking on water is told in three of the four Gospels. We still possess a hymn written about this incident in the fourth-century.

Matthew 14:24–33	Mark 6:47–52	John 6:16–21
<p>By this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. 25 And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. 26 But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, “It is a ghost!” And they cried out in fear. 27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.”</p> <p>28 Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” 29 He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. 30 But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!” 31 Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” 32 When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. 33 And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”</p>	<p>When evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. 48 When he saw that they were straining at the oars against an adverse wind, he came towards them early in the morning, walking on the sea. He intended to pass them by. 49 But when they saw him walking on the sea, they thought it was a ghost and cried out; 50 for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.” 51 Then he got into the boat with them and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, 52 for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.</p>	<p>When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, 17 got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. 18 The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. 19 When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. 20 But he said to them, “It is I; do not be afraid.” 21 Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going.</p>

Prudentius (348–ca. 405) was a Roman Christian poet who lived in Spain and wrote numerous hymns based on biblical or theological themes. His meditation on the birth of Christ, “Of the Father’s Love Begotten,” remains a popular Christmas hymn in many churches to this day. Here is his hymn inspired by Jesus walking on the water:

He walks dry-shod upon the flowing tide
And bears upon the flood with footsteps sure.
He chides the winds and bids the tempest cease.
Who would command the stormy gales: “Be still,
Your strongholds keep and leave the boundless sea,”
Except the Lord and maker of the winds? . . .

Excerpt from “A Hymn on the Trinity”¹

1. Aurelius Prudentius, *The Hymns of Prudentius*, trans. R. Martin Pope (London: J. M. Dent and Co. Aldine House, 1905).

9.26

John 11:1–53—Raising of Lazarus

Romanos the Melodist (ca. 485–85) was a Byzantine liturgical poet associated with the Orthodox Church in Syria. He is known for having composed *kontakia*, chanted sermons presented in verse with refrains for congregational participation. Each *kontakion* consists of a prelude and thirteen to twenty-four metrically identical stanzas, each of which concludes with the same refrain.

Here is the first verse from Romanos's *kontakion* on the raising of Lazarus. The verses would have been sung from the pulpit, accompanied by music. The italicized line would have been sung by a choir or, probably, the entire congregation. The story on which this *kontakion* is based may be found in John 11:1–53.

O Christ, Thou who knowest all things,
Thou hast asked to learn where the tomb of Lazarus is,
And arriving there, Thou hast raised him up on the fourth day,
O All-powerful One,
Taking pity, Merciful One, on
The tears of Mary and Martha.

10.0

Acts: Outline of Contents

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HarperCollins Bible Dictionary, ed. Mark Allan Powell (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 11.

10.1

Content Summary: Expanded Overview of the Book of Acts

A preface addressed to Theophilus identifies this book as the follow-up to a previous work about Jesus; a brief summary recalls his resurrection and promise of the Holy Spirit. (1:1–5)

Jesus ascends into heaven after telling the disciples that they will receive power from the Holy Spirit to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. (1:6–11)

The eleven disciples devote themselves to prayer, along with Mary and the brothers of Jesus. At the instigation of Peter they cast lots to replace Judas with a new apostle, Matthias. (1:12–26)

On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit fills 120 believers, who speak in tongues (unlearned languages). Peter preaches to the crowd that gathers, and about three thousand people respond to his invitation to repent and be baptized. (2:1–41)

The early church is marked by apostolic teaching, fellowship, signs and wonders, prayer, daily temple worship, the breaking of bread, and a daily increase of those being saved. (2:42–47)

Peter heals a lame man at the temple gate in the name of Jesus and preaches to the crowd that gathers. Peter and John are arrested, and Peter preaches boldly to the religious leaders, who place

them on trial. They are ordered not to teach in the name of Jesus again. (3:1–4:22)

The church prays for boldness, and the place where the believers have gathered is shaken by the power of the Holy Spirit. (4:23–31)

Members of the Jerusalem church hold all things in common.

Barnabas sells a field and gives the money to the church, but a married couple, Ananias and Sapphira, try to cheat the church by holding money back, and both of them are struck dead. (4:32–5:11)

Many signs and wonders are worked through the apostles. When Peter’s shadow falls on people, the sick and the demon-possessed are healed. (5:12–16)

The high priest has the apostles arrested, but an angel lets them out of prison. Guards bring them back before the council, where Peter says, “We must obey God rather than any human authority.” (5:17–32)

Gamaliel (a member of the council) recommends that no action be taken against the apostles, since their movement will die out on its own if it is not of God. The apostles are flogged, but they rejoice to have been found worthy of suffering in Jesus’s name, and they continue to teach daily in the temple. (5:33–42)

A dispute arises between Hellenists and Hebrews concerning provision for widows; the apostles appoint seven men to be in

charge of “waiting tables” and other matters, two of the men being Stephen and Philip. (6:1–6)

Stephen’s ministry arouses opposition, and he is stoned to death after delivering a long speech that recounts the history of Israel and attributes the building of the temple to obstinacy. (6:7–7:60)

Saul (later known as Paul) leads a violent persecution against Christians that scatters the church to different areas. (8:1–3)

Philip evangelizes the Samaritans, and Peter and John come to impart the Holy Spirit to those whom Philip had baptized. One of these converts, Simon Magus, tries to purchase the ability to give the Spirit. (8:4–25)

An angel leads Philip to evangelize an Ethiopian eunuch, and after he is baptized, the Spirit snatches Philip away for other ventures. (8:26–40)

Jesus appears to Saul on the road to Damascus and sends Ananias to baptize him and remove his temporary blindness. (9:1–19)

Now a believer, Saul is introduced to other believers and confounds Jews with his arguments. He evades plots to kill him, at one point being lowered over the wall of Damascus in a basket. (9:19–31)

Peter heals Aeneas in Lydda and raises Dorcas (Tabitha) from the dead in Joppa, (9:32–43)

Peter baptizes a gentile centurion, Cornelius, after receiving a vision of unclean animals accompanied by the command, “What God

has made clean, you must not call profane.” The gentiles speak in tongues, as the disciples did at Pentecost. (10:1–48)

Peter justifies the baptism of gentiles by recounting the story of Cornelius to others. (11:1–18)

The church at Antioch initiates a mission to gentiles, and Barnabas and Saul are summoned to become leaders there. The believers are now called “Christians” for the first time. (11:19–26)

Agabus, a prophet, predicts a famine that inspires a collection on behalf of believers in Judea; it is delivered to Jerusalem by Barnabas and Saul. (11:27–30)

Herod kills James the disciple of Jesus and puts Peter in prison. (12:1–5)

An angel releases Peter from prison, and he seeks refuge in the house of John Mark’s mother, where people are praying on his behalf. A servant, Rhoda, is slow to let him in. (12:6–19)

After an adoring crowd proclaims Herod to be a god, he is struck by an angel, eaten by worms, and dies. (12:20–23)

Barnabas and Saul return to Antioch with John Mark and are then sent out by that church on a missionary journey. (12:24–13:3)

On the island of Cyprus, the proconsul Sergius Paulus believes after Paul curses his magician Elymas, who is struck temporarily blind. (13:4–12)

Paul preaches to Jews in a synagogue at Pisidian Antioch with some success, but eventually he meets with so much opposition from the Jews that he decides to evangelize gentiles instead; this pattern is repeated in Iconium. (13:13–14:7)

After healing a lame man in Lystra, Paul and Barnabas are identified as Hermes and Zeus. They subsequently enjoy evangelistic success in the area until Jews from Antioch and Iconium intervene, stoning Paul and leaving him for dead. (14:8–20)

Saul and Barnabas complete their missionary journey by revisiting some places, appointing elders, and warning of persecutions to come. (14:21–28)

A council is held in Jerusalem to determine whether gentiles may be saved without first being circumcised; James the brother of Jesus presides, and the decision reached is that gentiles need not be circumcised, provided they keep certain other regulations. (15:1–35)

Paul sets out on a second missionary journey, parting company with Barnabas, who wants to take John Mark along, and taking Silas as his companion instead. Paul objects to the inclusion of John Mark because he did not complete the previous journey. (15:36–41)

Paul circumcises Timothy so as not to offend Jews, and then the Spirit both restricts and guides their travels so that they will cross over to Macedonia. (16:1–10)

In Philippi, Lydia, a dealer of purple cloth, becomes a believer on the Sabbath day in a place of prayer by a river; she opens her house to Paul and his team. (16:11–15)

Paul exorcizes a divination spirit from a slave girl who works as a fortune-teller. He and Silas are arrested and put in stocks; they sing hymns in prison and, after an earthquake sets them free, baptize the jailer and his household. When Paul reveals that he is a Roman citizen, the magistrates apologize. (16:16–40)

In Thessalonica, Paul has some success evangelizing Jews in a synagogue, but when the opposition grows, an angry mob attacks Jason, with whom Paul's company has been staying. The mob refers to the Christians as those "who have been turning the world upside down." (17:1–9)

The Jews are more receptive in Berea and check the Scriptures to see if what Paul says holds up, but trouble starts when Jews from Thessalonica come to incite the crowds. (17:10–15)

Paul preaches to philosophers on the Areopagus in Athens; most scoff at his mention of resurrection from the dead. Dionysius the Areopagite and Damaris become believers. (17:16–34)

Paul arrives in Corinth and lives with Aquila and Priscilla, Jewish Christians who, like him, make a living as tent-makers. He spends eighteen months there and eventually is brought before the proconsul Gallio, who refuses to rule on matters of Jewish religion. (18:1–17)

Paul has his hair cut as one under a vow and then returns to Antioch by way of Ephesus and Jerusalem. (18:18–22)

Paul sets out on a third missionary journey. Meanwhile, Priscilla and Aquila instruct an eloquent believer, Apollos, to know the way of God “more accurately,” and he becomes a powerful teacher of the faith. (18:23–28)

Paul comes to Ephesus and encounters disciples who know only the baptism of John and have not received the Holy Spirit; he baptizes them in the name of Jesus, and they are filled with the Spirit, speaking in tongues and prophesying. (19:1–7)

Paul continues to teach and work miracles in Ephesus for two years; when handkerchiefs or aprons that touched his skin are brought to the sick, diseases are cured and demons are expelled. (19:8–12)

Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish priest, try to exorcize demons in the name of “the Jesus whom Paul proclaims,” but the demons overpower them. As a result, those who practice magic burn their books. (19:13–20)

A riot erupts in Ephesus after Demetrius the silversmith convinces people that the city’s economy and honor are threatened by the Christian affront to the temple of Artemis. (19:21–41)

As Paul continues to travel, he ends up in Troas, where he preaches long into the night. A young man, Eutychus, falls asleep and

tumbles out of a third-floor window. Paul embraces him, declares him alive, and continues to preach, (20:1–12)

As Paul continues toward home, he invites the elders of Ephesus to join him in Miletus and preaches a farewell homily to them, claiming that they will not see him again, (20:13–38)

As Paul's third journey comes to an end, he is told through the Spirit not to go to Jerusalem. He stays at the home of Philip, who has four daughters with the gift of prophecy. The prophet Agabus from Judea binds himself with Paul's belt to symbolize what will happen to Paul in Jerusalem. (21:1–16)

Paul goes to Jerusalem and on the advice of James goes through a purification rite to please Jewish believers there. Then Jews from Asia incite a riot by falsely claiming Paul has brought gentiles into the temple. (21:17–36)

The Roman tribune allows Paul to address the crowd, and he tells the story of his conversion. Those in the crowd are angered when he claims that the Lord sent him to gentiles. The tribune, after hearing Paul declare himself to be a Roman citizen, realizes that Paul cannot be flogged. (21:37–22:29)

Paul is brought before the Jewish council, where he exploits the division between Pharisees and Sadducees by claiming that he is on trial for believing in the resurrection of the dead. (22:30–23:10)

The Lord tells Paul that he must bear witness in Rome. (23:11)

Paul is transferred by night to the care of the governor Felix in Caesarea after his nephew informs the Roman officials of a plot by some Jews to murder Paul. (23:12–35)

Ananias the high priest and other Jews bring charges against Paul before Felix, and Paul offers a defense speech. Felix leaves Paul in prison for two years to please the Jews and in hopes of receiving a bribe. (24:1–27)

Paul has another hearing before the next governor, Festus. He appeals to the emperor to avoid being sent to Jerusalem, since the Jews were planning to kill Paul en route. (25:1–12)

Agrippa and Bernice visit Festus and listen to Paul relate the story of his conversion one more time. Agrippa says that Paul could have been set free if he had not appealed to the emperor. (25:13–26:32)

Paul is taken as a prisoner on a sea voyage intended for Rome, but storms and a shipwreck strand Paul and the other travelers on the island of Malta. (27:1–28:1)

On Malta, Paul is unharmed after being bitten by a deadly viper, and he heals the father of Publius, a leading man among the island's friendly natives. (28:2–10)

After three months Paul is brought to Rome, where he is placed under house arrest and argues with Jews over his teachings.

Finally, he announces that the salvation of God has been sent to gentiles because they will listen. (28:11–29)

Paul continues to preach freely in Rome for two years. (28:30–31)

10.2

Acts in the Revised Common Lectionary

Text	Content	Series	Liturgical Occasion	Calendar Date
1:1–11	Preface, ascension of Jesus	A, B, C	Ascension	6 Thursdays after Easter
1:6–14	Ascension of Jesus	A	Easter 7	6 Sundays after Easter
1:15–17, 21–26	Selection of Matthias	B	Easter 7	6 Sundays after Easter
2:1–21	Outpouring of the Spirit	A, B, C	Pentecost	7 Sundays after Easter
2:14a, 22–32	Peter's Pentecost sermon	A	Easter 2	1 Sunday after Easter
2:14a, 36–41	Baptism of Pentecost believers	A	Easter 3	2 Sundays after Easter
2:42–47	Life of early church	A	Easter 4	3 Sundays after Easter
3:12–19	Peter's sermon at the temple	B	Easter 3	2 Sundays after Easter
4:5–12	Peter addresses the council	B	Easter 4	3 Sundays after Easter
4:32–35	Marks of early church	B	Easter 2	1 Sunday after Easter
5:27–32	Peter testifies before the council	C	Easter 2	1 Sunday after Easter
7:55–60	Martyrdom of Stephen	A	Easter 5	4 Sundays after Easter
8:14–17	Samaritans receive the Spirit	C	Epiphany 1	Jan. 7–13
8:14–17	Samaritans receive the Spirit	A, B, C	Easter Day	Easter
8:26–40	Philip and Ethiopian eunuch	B	Easter 5	4 Sundays after Easter
9:1–6 (7–20)	Conversion of Paul	C	Easter 3	2 Sundays after Easter
9:36–43	Resuscitation of Dorcas	C	Easter 4	3 Sundays after Easter
10:34–43	Peter and	A	Epiphany 1	Jan. 7–13

	Cornelius			
10:34–43	Peter and Cornelius	A, B, C	Easter Day	Easter
10:44–48	Gentiles receive the Spirit	B	Easter 6	5 Sundays after Easter
11:1–18	Peter tells story of Cornelius	C	Easter 5	4 Sundays after Easter
16:9–15	Gospel to Macedonia	C	Easter 6	5 Sundays after Easter
16:16–34	Paul and Silas in Philippi	C	Easter 7	6 Sundays after Easter
17:22–31	Paul on the Areopagus	A	Easter 6	5 Sundays after Easter
19:1–7	Ephesians receive the Spirit	B	Epiphany 1	Jan. 7–13

10.3

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10.4

Distinctive Characteristics of the Book of Acts

A. The book of Acts is a sequel to Luke’s Gospel, which is referred to as “the first book” (1:1).

B. The book of Acts relates stories that parallel events reported in Luke’s Gospel.

	Luke	Acts
Preface and dedication to Theophilus	1:1–4	1:1–5
Coming of the Spirit during prayer	3:21–22	2:1–13
Inaugural sermon on fulfillment of prophecy	4:16–27	2:14–40
Healing of lame man	5:17–26	3:1–10
Conflicts with religious leaders	5:29–6:11	4:1–8:3
Invitation to visit house of centurion	7:1–10	10:1–23
Story involving a widow and a resurrection	7:11–17	9:36–43
Missionary journeys to gentiles	10:1–12	13:1–19:20
Journey to Jerusalem, where hero is arrested	9:51–19:28	19:21–21:17
Series of four trials	22:26–23:13	23:1–26:32

C. Acts offers heroic portrayals of people in the life of the early church.

- Peter (chaps. 1–5; 10–12)
- Stephen (chaps. 6–7)
- Philip (chap. 8)
- James (chap. 15)

- Paul (chaps. 9; 13–28)

The words and deeds of these individuals are reported in ways that parallel those of Jesus in Luke's Gospel (in fulfillment of Luke 6:40).

- Stephen's dying words (7:59–60; cf. Luke 23:34, 46)
- Paul's apron (19:11–12; cf. Luke 8:43–48)

D. The author of Acts claims to have sometimes been a companion of Paul.

See the "we passages" (16:10–17; 20:5–15; 21:1–8; 27:1–28:16).

E. Almost one-third of Acts consists of speeches.

- missionary speeches (2:14–36; 3:12–26; 10:34–43; 13:16–41; 17:22–31)
- speeches to Christians (1:16–22; 11:5–17; 15:7–11, 13–21; 20:18–35)
- defense speeches (4:8–12; 7:2–53; 22:1–21; 24:10–21; 26:2–23)

F. Acts records the advance and progress of the church's mission.

- geographical expansion (1:8)
- numerical growth (1:15; 2:41; 4:4; 5:14; 6:7; 9:31; 11:21, 24; 12:24; 14:1; 16:5; 19:17–20; 28:30–31)
- ethnic diversity: Jews and gentiles (e.g., chap. 15)

G. In Acts, the success of ministry to Israel is ambiguous.

- Jews accept the gospel (2:41; 4:4; 6:7; 21:20)
- Jews reject the gospel (13:46; 18:6; 28:25–28)

H. In Acts, Jerusalem appears to have special prominence.

- starting point for mission (1:8; cf. Luke 24:49)
- location for church council (chap. 15)
- headquarters to which Paul reports (9:26; 11:27–30; 12:25; 18:22; 21:15)

I. Acts presents an idealized portrait of the church.

- a unified, peaceful community (2:44–45; 4:32–37)
- Peter, James, and Paul are of one mind (chap. 15; cf. Gal. 2:11–14)

J. Acts takes a positive attitude toward the Roman Empire.

- sympathy for Christians from Rome (18:12–16; 19:35–41; 23:10–35)
- Roman converts to Christianity (10:1–48; 13:7–12; 16:25–34)
- Paul is proud of his citizenship (16:37–40; 22:25–29)

K. Acts presents Jesus as located in heaven (7:56) but still active on earth.

- through the Holy Spirit (16:7)
- through use of his name (2:21; 3:6; 4:12, 30; 10:43; 16:18)

- through preaching of the word (13:26)
- through lives of his followers (9:5)

Thus Acts continues the account in Luke's Gospel, which narrated only what Jesus began to say and do (Acts 1:1).

L. Acts emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit.

- empowering people to be witnesses (1:8)
- directing the life and mission of the church (8:29; 10:19; 11:28; 13:2; 15:28; 20:23; 21:4, 11)
- coming upon and filling people (2:4; 4:31; 8:14–17; 10:44–48; 19:1–7)

M. “Promise/fulfillment” is a prominent theme in Acts.

- fulfillment of Scripture (2:16–21; 3:18; 15:15–17; 28:25–28)
- fulfillment of what is “necessary” (1:22; 9:6, 16; 13:46; 14:22; 17:3; 19:21; 23:11; 25:10; 27:24)

N. “Salvation” is a prominent theme in Acts.

- salvation bestowed by Jesus (2:33–40; 5:31; 13:23–39; 15:1–11; 16:30–31) or received through his name (2:21; 3:16; 4:12)
- salvation may consist of
 - eternal life (13:46)
 - forgiveness (2:38; 5:31; 10:43; 13:38–39)

the gift of the Holy Spirit (2:38; 11:15)

temporal blessings (3:8; 7:25; 14:9; 27:22, 34, 44)

10.5

The “We Passages” in the Book of Acts

The author of Acts occasionally employs the pronoun “we” when recounting the travels of Paul and his companions (16:10–17; 20:5–15; 21:1–8; 27:1–28:16). Scholars call these portions of Acts the “we passages.”

Throughout history, most Bible readers have assumed that the author of Acts means to include himself as being among Paul’s company in these portions of the narrative. Thus it is traditionally held that the author of Acts accompanied Paul for portions of his second and third missionary journeys.

Some scholars, however, do not think that Acts could have been authored by one of Paul’s companions. The book is anonymous, after all, and (these scholars claim) it presents a rather different picture of Paul from the one that we obtain from his own letters. But what, then, should we make of the “we passages”? Those scholars who question whether the author of Acts was actually a companion of Paul usually explain them in one of the following ways (objections to the explanations are given beneath each one):

Some anonymous author is falsely claiming to have been a companion of Paul in order to gain more credibility for his work.

But why wouldn’t that person simply write the book pseudepigraphically? Why not write the book falsely in the name of

some famous or illustrious companion of Paul and pass it off as that person's work, as opposed to taking the subtle approach and leaving readers to guess whether the book might be written by someone who occasionally traveled with the apostle Paul?

An unknown author is using a source (a travel diary?) kept by someone who worked with Paul and is copying from that work without changing the pronouns.

But in the Gospel of Luke, this same author does make stylistic changes in the material that he takes from Mark's Gospel. Why would he copy a source so slavishly when writing the book of Acts?

The use of the pronoun "we" is simply a literary device to help readers experience the story firsthand. The "we" is not meant to include the author in the story so much as it is meant to include the book's readers. Luke wants to put his readers on the boat with Paul so that they will witness what transpires in the story as though they were there when it was happening.

But why use this device in such a hit-and-miss fashion? Why not use it elsewhere in the story, or, for that matter, why not use it consistently throughout the narrative? What is there about these specific passages that would call for such intimate involvement of readers when other passages apparently do not?

Due to the objections noted, most scholars think that the "we passages" are best understood in a straightforward manner: the

author of Acts (and also of Luke's Gospel) did travel with Paul on a few occasions.

10.6

Parallels between Luke's Gospel and the Book of Acts (Box 10.4)

Luke's Gospel	Acts
Preface to Theophilus (1:1–4)	Preface to Theophilus (1:1–5)
Spirit descends on Jesus as he prays (3:21–22)	Spirit comes to apostles as they pray (2:1–13)
Sermon declares prophecy fulfilled (4:16–27)	Sermon declares prophecy fulfilled (2:14–40)
Jesus heals a lame man (5:17–26)	Peter heals a lame man (3:1–10)
Religious leaders attack Jesus (5:29–6:11)	Religious leaders attack apostles (4:1–8:3)
Centurion invites Jesus to his house (7:1–10)	Centurion invites Peter to his house (10:1–23)
Jesus raises widow's son from death (7:11–17)	Peter raises widow from death (9:36–43)
Missionary journey to gentiles (10:1–12)	Missionary journeys to gentiles (13:1–19:20)
Jesus travels to Jerusalem (9:51–19:28)	Paul travels to Jerusalem (19:21–21:17)
Jesus is received favorably (19:37)	Paul is received favorably (21:17–20)
Jesus is devoted to the temple (19:45–48)	Paul is devoted to the temple (21:26)
Sadducees oppose Jesus, but scribes support him (20:27–39)	Sadducees oppose Paul, but Pharisees support him (23:6–9)
Jesus breaks bread and gives thanks (22:19)	Paul breaks bread and gives thanks (27:35)
Jesus is seized by an angry mob (22:54)	Paul is seized by an angry mob (21:30)
Jesus is slapped by high priest's aides (22:63–64)	Paul is slapped at high priest's command (23:2)
Jesus is tried four times and declared innocent three times (22:66–23:13)	Paul is tried four times and declared innocent three times (23:1–26:32)
Jesus is rejected by the Jews (23:18)	Paul is rejected by the Jews (21:36)
Jesus is regarded favorably by a centurion (23:47)	Paul is regarded favorably by a centurion (27:43)
Final confirmation that Scriptures have been fulfilled (24:45–47)	Final confirmation that Scriptures have been fulfilled (28:23–28)

10.7

Roman Rulers Mentioned in the Book of Acts

Roman Rulers in Palestine

Herod Agrippa: Ruled Galilee (37–44 CE) and All Palestine (41–44 CE)

- a grandson of Herod the Great who was allowed to rule all Palestine in what was a short-lived restoration of the Herodian Empire
- persecuted the fledgling Christian movement in Jerusalem; put James the disciple of Jesus to death and imprisoned Peter (12:1–3)
- politically popular and successful but, according to Acts, was struck by an angel of the Lord for not giving glory to God; eaten by worms and died (12:20–23)

Felix: Ruled Judea (53–60 CE)

- ruled as a procurator or prefect, similar to Pontius Pilate
- a former slave of the emperor Claudius's mother
- his brother Pallas was a close adviser to both Claudius and Nero
- had a Jewish wife, Drusilla (24:24), who was the sister of Agrippa II

- presided at a hearing in Caesarea regarding the fate of Paul, who had been arrested in Jerusalem (chaps. 23–24); described as well informed about Christianity (24:22)
- keeps Paul in prison in Caesarea for two years and passes him on to Festus

Festus: Ruled Judea (60–62 CE)

- another procurator or prefect, successor to Felix
- presided over a new hearing in Caesarea concerning Paul, after which Paul appeals to have his case heard in Rome (25:1–12)
- plays host to Agrippa II and his sister Bernice and gives Paul a chance to preach to them (25:13–27)

Herod Agrippa II: Ruled Galilee (44–100 CE)

- had an unusually long tenure: ruler of Galilee for more than fifty years, including the tumultuous period of the Jewish war with Rome (66–73)
- in the New Testament known only in Acts for his visit (with sister Bernice) to Festus in Caesarea, where he listens to Paul's account of his conversion (25:13–26:32)

Roman Rulers outside Palestine

Sergius Paulus: Proconsul of Cyprus (Date Unknown)

- in Acts, invites Paul and Barnabas to share the Christian message with him and witnesses a punishment miracle when his court magician is struck blind (13:4–12)

Gallio: Proconsul of Achaia (ca. 51–52 CE)

- in Acts, dismisses a mob that has seized Paul, refusing to rule on charges that have to do with religious beliefs rather than substantive criminal matters (18:12–17)

Summary: References to Roman Rulers in the Book of Acts

Herod Agrippa I (12:1–23)

Felix (23:23–24:27)

Festus (chaps. 25–26)

Herod Agrippa II (chaps. 25–26)

Sergius Paulus (13:4–12)

Gallio (18:12–17)

10.8

Speeches in the Book of Acts

Almost one-third of the book of Acts consists of speeches.

Missionary Speeches

- Peter's sermon to Jews from many nations at Pentecost (2:14–36)
- Peter's address to the crowd in Solomon's Portico (3:12–26)
- Peter's sermon to Cornelius and his household (10:34–43)
- Paul's synagogue sermon at Psidian Antioch (13:16–41)
- Paul's discourse to philosophers at Athens (17:22–31)

Speeches to Christians

- by Peter, regarding the replacement of Judas (1:16–22)
- by Peter, regarding the baptism of Cornelius (11:5–17)
- by Peter at the Jerusalem council (15:7–11)
- by James at the Jerusalem council (15:13–21)
- by Paul to the Ephesian elders (20:18–35)

Defense Speeches

- by Peter to the high priest and Jewish council of elders (4:8–12)

- by Stephen to the high priest and Jewish council of elders
(7:2–53)
- by Paul to a Jewish mob, after he is arrested in Jerusalem
(22:1–21)
- by Paul to the governor Felix (24:10–21)
- by Paul to King Agrippa (26:2–23)

10.9

Miracles in Acts

A list of healing and other miracles mentioned in the book of Acts.

Passage	Miracle	Location
3:1–11	Peter heals a lame man	Jerusalem
5:1–10	Ananias and Sapphira struck dead	Jerusalem
5:12–16	Apostles perform many wonders	Jerusalem
8:14–17	Peter and John communicate the Holy Spirit	Samaria
9:1–9	Paul converted	Road to Damascus
9:33–34	Peter heals Eneas of a palsy	Lydda
9:36–41	Peter raises Tabitha, or Dorcas, to life	Joppa
12:7–17	Peter delivered out of prison by an angel	Jerusalem
12:21–23	God smites Herod, so that he dies	Jerusalem
13:6–11	Elymas, the sorcerer, smitten with blindness	Paphos
14:8–10	Paul heals a cripple	Lystra
16:16–18	Paul casts out a spirit of divination	Philippi
16:25–26	Paul and Silas's prison doors opened by an earthquake	Philippi
19:1–6	Paul communicates the Holy Spirit	Corinth
19:11–12	Paul heals multitudes	Corinth
20:9–12	Paul restores Eutychus to life	Troas
28:3–6	Paul shakes off a viper	Malta
28:7–9	Paul heals the father of Publius and others	Malta

10.10

Salvation in the Book of Acts (Box 10.6)

This chart lists the passages in the book of Acts in which the words *sōtēr* (“savior”), *sōtēria* (“salvation”), *sōtēria* (“salvation”), or *sōzein* (“to save”) are used.

Text	Who Is to Be Saved?	Of What Does Salvation Consist?	Who or What Brings Salvation?	How Is Salvation Received?
2:21	everyone	escape from apocalypse	the Lord’s name	calling
2:40	Jews (2:36)	forgiveness, Holy Spirit	exalted Jesus (2:33)	repentance, baptism (2:38)
2:47	additional numbers of believers	————	the Lord	————
4:9	lame man (3:2)	being enabled to walk	name of Jesus (3:16)	faith (3:16)
4:12	people	————	name of Jesus	————
5:31	Israel	repentance, forgiveness	exalted Jesus	————
7:25	Israel	rescue from enemies	Moses	————
11:14	gentiles	Holy Spirit (11:15), repentance (11:18)	God (11:17)	faith (11:17)
13:23, 26	Israel, God-fearers (13:17, 26)	forgiveness, freedom (13:38–39)	risen Jesus (13:32–39)	faith (13:39)
13:47	gentiles	eternal life	————	————
14:9	lame man	being enabled to walk	word of Paul	faith
15:1, 11	Jews, gentiles	————	the Lord Jesus	grace
16:30–31	jailer, family	————	the Lord Jesus	faith
27:20, 31	sailors, Paul	survival (27:23, 34, 44)	God (27:23)	obedience
28:28	gentiles	(spiritual) healing	God	listening

10.11

Church of Joy (Box 10.7)

In Acts, Luke emphasizes joy as a primary characteristic of the early church's life and mission:

- Disciples rejoice that they are considered worthy to suffer for Jesus's name (5:41).
- There is "great joy in that city" when the gospel comes to Samaria (8:8).
- The Ethiopian eunuch goes "on his way rejoicing" after being baptized (8:39).
- Barnabas rejoices when he witnesses God's grace in Antioch (11:23).
- The disciples are "filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit" (13:52).
- God blesses even pagan idol-worshippers by filling their hearts with joy (14:15–17).
- The conversion of gentiles brings "great joy to all the believers" (15:3).
- The gentiles rejoice when they hear the decision of the Jerusalem council (15:31).
- A jailer and his family rejoice after they are baptized (16:33–34).

This is a prominent theme in the Gospel of Luke as well (see 1:14, 44, 47, 58; 2:10; 6:23; 10:17, 20, 21; 13:17; 15:3–10, 32; 24:41, 52).

10.12

People in the Book of Acts

Agabus (Acts 11:28)	an early Christian prophet who predicts a famine that inspires a collection on behalf of believers in Jerusalem
Agabus (Acts 21:10)	an early Christian prophet who predicts Paul's arrest in Jerusalem, binding Paul symbolically with his own belt
Agrippa (actually Herod Agrippa II)	ruler of Galilee who hears Paul's testimony while he is in prison in Caesarea under Festus
Ananias (Acts 5)	man who tries to cheat the church by holding back money (along with wife, Sapphira)
Ananias (Acts 9)	man sent by God to baptize Paul after his Damascus road experience
Ananias (Acts 22)	high priest in Jerusalem who presides over trial of Paul before Jewish council
Apollos	an elegant and powerful teacher who needs to be instructed by Aquila and Priscilla to know the faith "more accurately"
Aquila	a tentmaker who becomes a close friend of Paul, along with his wife, Priscilla; with her, instructs Apollos in the way of the faith "more accurately"
Barnabas	member of Jerusalem church who sells a field and gives money to the church; brings Paul to Antioch, where the two of them become leaders in the gentile mission; partner with Paul on his first missionary journey but later splits with Paul, going off on his own with John Mark as his companion
Cornelius	a gentile centurion baptized by Peter
Demetrius the silversmith	instigates a riot in Ephesus by claiming Paul's evangelistic work is undermining the temple of Artemis
Dorcas	a woman known in the early church for her kindness to widows and who was raised from the dead by Peter (also called "Tabitha")
Elymas	a magician who is struck temporarily blind when Paul curses him
Eutychus	young man who falls asleep while Paul is preaching and tumbles out a third-

	story window
Felix	governor in Caesarea who leaves Paul in prison for two years to please the Jews
Festus	governor in Caesarea (after Felix), under whom Paul appeals to Caesar
Gamaliel	member of the Jewish council who advises against persecution of the apostles
Herod (Herod Agrippa I)	kills James the disciple of Jesus; has Peter put in prison, but an angel lets him out; eaten by worms and dies after an angel strikes him for presenting himself as a god
James the brother of Jesus	leader of the church in Jerusalem who presides over the apostolic council called to discuss circumcision of gentiles
James the disciple of Jesus	killed by Herod Agrippa during early years of the Jerusalem church
John Mark	son of a leading woman in the Jerusalem church and nephew of Barnabas; accompanies Paul and Barnabas on first missionary journey, but turns back part way; he is the cause of a split between Paul and Barnabas before their second missionary journey
Lydia	a dealer of purple goods in Philippi who becomes host to Paul and his companions
Matthias	the new apostle, added to the group after Easter to replace Judas
Paul	also known as Saul; a persecutor of the early believers who has a vision of the risen Christ and becomes a missionary for the faith; leads three missionary journeys to areas in the west, evangelizing many gentiles; works many miracles, such that even his handkerchiefs heal all whom they touch; after a series of trials, is taken to Rome to stand before Caesar
Peter	preaches to multiethnic crowd on day of Pentecost, gaining 3,000 converts; baptizes the centurion Cornelius in a way that prefigures the gentile mission; becomes so filled with spiritual power that his shadow heals all on whom it falls; raises Dorcas (Tabitha) from the dead; imprisoned by Herod and then

	released by an angel
Philip	one of the seven men appointed to “wait tables” (serve as deacons?) in the Jerusalem church; evangelizes an Ethiopian eunuch; led by the Spirit to evangelize the Samaritans and baptize them; has four daughters who prophesy
Priscilla	one of Paul’s close friends, along with her husband, Aquila; with him, instructs Apollos in the way of the faith “more accurately”
Rhoda	servant at house belonging to John Mark’s mother in Jerusalem; is slow to admit Peter when he is released from prison by an angel
Sapphira (Acts 5)	woman who tries to cheat the church by holding back money (along with husband, Ananias).
Sceva	Jewish priest whose seven sons try to cast out demons in the name of the Jesus whom Paul proclaims
Silas	imprisoned with Paul in Philippi, where they sing hymns while in stocks
Simon Magus	a magician in Samaria who becomes a believer; offers Peter money to obtain the power of giving the Holy Spirit to people
Stephen	one of the seven men appointed to “wait tables” (serve as deacons?) in the Jerusalem church; the first martyr, stoned to death after speaking against the temple
Timothy	son of a Jewish mother and gentile father who joins Paul on his second missionary journey; circumcised by Paul so as not to offend the Jews

10.13

Apollos

Apollos (pronounced uh-pol'uhhs) was a Jewish Christian from Alexandria who appears in the narrative of Acts (18:24–19:1) and is also mentioned in 1 Corinthians. According to Acts, he possessed great skills in Greek rhetoric and had already learned much about Jesus when he arrived in Ephesus and began speaking at the synagogue. His abilities soon brought him to the attention of the Christians Priscilla (Prisca) and Aquila, who gave him further instruction in the Christian faith (“he knew only the baptism of John”; 18:25). Apollos then left Ephesus to go to Corinth, where he became acquainted with Paul. When divisions arose in the church at Corinth, Apollos was admired by some Christians as an authority equal to Peter and Paul (1 Cor. 1:11–4:6). Brief mention of Apollos is made in Titus 3:13.

10.14

Barnabas

The book of Acts refers frequently to an important leader in the church named Barnabas (pronounced bahr´nuh-buhs). His name was actually Joseph but the apostles in Jerusalem decided to call him “Barnabas,” which in Hebrew means “son of encouragement” (Acts 4:36).

This renaming was in sync with the practice of Jesus who decided to call one of his disciples “Peter” (“rock” in Greek), even though his birth name was Simon. Neither “Peter” nor “Barnabas” is known to have been used as names prior to these applications by Jesus and the apostles.

In any case, Barnabas was a Levite from Cyprus, and so, a Jew from the Diaspora who had perhaps moved to Jerusalem, or perhaps was simply visiting when he encountered the Christian community there. He became a member of that early church quite early, though there is no reason to believe he was among the 120 on the day of Pentecost. More likely, he could have been among the 3,000 added to the church on that day (Acts 2:41), though that is also just speculation.

Barnabas was a cousin of John Mark (Col. 4:10) and soon became a leader in the church. He is first mentioned as the prime example of believers who took seriously the community’s commitment to hold all

things in common. He sold a field and laid the money at the apostles' feet to be used by the community as a whole (Acts 4:36–37). In this way, he is presented as the antithesis of Ananias and Sapphira, two greedy Christians who sought to take advantage of the “all things in common” policy by living out of the common purse while also holding on to their own private resources (Acts 5:1–10).

According to Acts, Barnabas was the person who introduced Saul (Paul) to the apostles in Jerusalem (9:27). Naturally, the apostles were initially suspicious of Saul, a new convert who had viciously persecuted them, but when Barnabas vouched for him they were more accepting.

Later Barnabas appears in Antioch, where he was sent as a representative of the Jerusalem church (11:19–26). He affirms the mission to the gentiles there and works with Saul as senior partner or supervisor of a Christian mission in Syria-Cilicia. Acts further reports that Barnabas and Saul took the famine offering from Antioch to Jerusalem (11:27–30; 12:25).

Paul and Barnabas traveled together on a mission tour to Cyprus and to the Iconium region of Asia Minor (13:1–14:28). They also appeared together at the Jerusalem council (15:1–35) but later disagreed over the question of allowing John Mark to accompany them on a second mission trip (15:36–41).

The problem was that John Mark had cut short his participation in an earlier mission (13:13). Paul took this to mean he was unreliable, but

Barnabas stood by his cousin. The dispute was so acrimonious that Barnabas and Paul had to part company and go their separate ways. The narrative in Acts follows Paul, who replaces Barnabas with Silas, and heads for Asia Minor and what is now Greece (Macedonia and Achaia). We are told almost in passing that Barnabas and Mark took off on a similar journey to Cyprus, where they both had worked with Paul previously (Acts 15:39; cf. 13:4). Nothing more is reported of this trip or its outcome.

Elsewhere, Barnabas is mentioned with reference to a dispute in Antioch over whether circumcised and uncircumcised believers should eat together (Gal. 2:11–14). According to Acts 15:1–35, Barnabas was a strong defender of not binding circumcision on gentile converts, as was Peter, but he and Peter apparently sided against Paul with regard to the related question of mixed table fellowship.

A mid-second-century document called the Epistle of Barnabas was accepted as an authentic work by Paul's associate by some leaders in the early church (Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria) but is universally regarded as pseudepigraphical today.

The book of Acts speaks of Barnabas as “a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith” (11:24). Paul, despite their problems, seems to regard Barnabas as an apostle in 1 Corinthians 9:1–6. The latter reference is especially noteworthy, since Paul and Barnabas are the only two people called “apostles” in the book of Acts who had not

been members of “the twelve” or among those who had known the earthly Jesus (Acts 14:4, 14; cf. 1:15–26).

According to a survey by Wayne O. McCready, Barnabas is primarily remembered in later tradition and literature in two distinct ways:¹

- First, Barnabas becomes something of a metaphor for a mentor who is surpassed by a pupil, especially when this pleases the mentor. One might say, “I played Barnabas to his Paul,” meaning, “I was honored to help him get started, but he has accomplished more than I ever did.” So Ghirlandaio could be regarded as Barnabas to Michelangelo’s Paul, and Anne Sullivan could be regarded as Barnabas to Helen Keller’s Paul (though the expression is not typically used for women).
- Second, Barnabas becomes a symbol for missionary work in which congregations are able to support ministry in other locales. John Milton in his *De Doctrina Christiana* laid out a plan to create a class of “extraordinary ministers” within the church patterned on the work of Barnabas, who was sent from the established church in Jerusalem to aid the developing community in Antioch.² Elsewhere, Milton makes a similar case with specific reference to financial resources: the sending of Barnabas from Jerusalem to Antioch provides the model for wealthier congregations to support ministry in surrounding villages.³

1. Wayne O. McCready, "Barnabas," in *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition and English Literature*, ed. David Lyle Jeffrey (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 76.
2. John Milton, "Of the Visible Church," in *De Doctrina Christiana* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1825), 1.29.
3. John Milton, *Considerations Touching the Likeliest Means to Remove Hirelings out of the Church* (London: T.N. for L. Chapman, 1659), n.p.

10.15

James and the Other Brothers of Jesus (Box 25.1)

The Synoptic Gospels report that Jesus had four brothers—James, Joses, Judas, and Simon—plus an unknown number of sisters whose names are also unknown (Mark 6:3). Since James is listed first, he is often thought to be the oldest of these brothers, although perhaps he is listed first simply because he was the one who became best known.

The Gospels indicate that the brothers of Jesus did not “believe in him” during the time of his ministry (John 7:5). At one point they attempt to seize him and take him home for a forced retirement from doing and saying things that are leading people to think he is “beside himself” (Mark 3:21, 31–35). The Gospel of John even presents Jesus on the cross choosing one of his disciples to care for his mother after his death, which seems like an affront to James and his other brothers (John 19:25–27).

After Easter, things changed. Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians that the risen Jesus appeared to James (1 Cor. 15:7). The book of Acts indicates that the brothers of Jesus (all of them?) were part of the early church in Jerusalem (Acts 1:14) and, apparently, were present for the great event on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1–4). A short while later, James appears to be the leader of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 12:17; 21:18). He presides over the apostolic

council described in Acts 15 and offers a final authoritative ruling that he expects to be disseminated and accepted by Christians everywhere (Acts 15:19–29; 21:25).

James's importance as a leader in the church is also acknowledged by Paul in Galatians, albeit somewhat grudgingly (Gal. 1:19; 2:6, 9). Paul disagreed sharply with James's policies regarding the continued relevance of certain markers of Jewish identity within the Christian community (Gal. 2:11–14). Still, he devoted a considerable portion of his ministry to supervising a collection for Christians in Jerusalem, where James was the recognized leader (Rom. 15:25–29; 2 Cor. 8–9).

The Jewish historian Josephus reports that James was murdered in 62 (see *Jewish Antiquities* 20.199–201). During an interim between on-site Roman rulers (when “Festus was dead and Albinus was still on the way”), the high priest Ananus II seized the opportunity to move against those whom he considered to be “lawbreakers.” He convened the judges of the Sanhedrin and delivered James and certain others to be stoned. Josephus notes that “the inhabitants of the city who were considered to be the most fair-minded and who were strict in their observance of the law were offended at this.” Furthermore, Josephus maintains that the action was judged to be illegal, and Ananus II subsequently was deposed by the new procurator on this account. A later Christian tradition, reported by Clement of Alexandria (third century), says that James was killed by

being thrown off the pinnacle of the temple, but this account is generally regarded as legendary.

Other traditions about James emphasize his traditional Jewish piety and his devotion to the law. Eusebius (fourth century) reports that he received his nickname “the Just” because he lived as a Nazirite, an ascetic who was especially devoted to God. Another oft-repeated tradition (reported by Eusebius) holds that James spent so much time praying in the temple that his knees became as calloused as those of a camel.

The apocryphal *Gospel of Thomas* (first or second century) contains an overwhelmingly positive affirmation of James. In one curious passage, Jesus’s disciples ask him who their leader will be after he departs; he answers, “You are to go to James the Just, for whose sake heaven and earth came into being” (*Gospel of Thomas* 12).

We have only a little information about the other brothers of Jesus. Paul refers to them as Christian missionaries, noting specifically that (unlike him) they were married and often accompanied by their wives (1 Cor. 9:5). Judas (= Jude) is the putative author of another New Testament letter.

10.16

Philip the Evangelist (or Philip the Deacon)

Philip the evangelist, although often confused with Philip the apostle (one of Jesus's twelve disciples), is a different but important church leader who appears only in the book of Acts.

According to Acts 6, the twelve apostles had become overwhelmed with pastoral duties in the Jerusalem church, preventing them from engaging in missionary activity. The solution was to choose seven men of good standing who were “full of the Spirit and wisdom” to take over some of these duties (6:2–6). Two of the seven men chosen would become famous in Christian history: Stephen became the first Christian martyr (Acts 7:54–60) and Philip became a stellar evangelist (Acts 8:5–39).

The most important duty entrusted to the seven was to “wait on tables.” This probably means that they were in charge of the church's eucharistic services, which were held daily around a common meal. Therefore, the seven new leaders have often been called *deacons* to distinguish them from *apostles*. The word “deacon” literally means “table waiter,” while the word “apostle” means “one who is sent”—thus a missionary.

In any case, the categories seem to have become quickly confused because we never actually hear about Philip waiting on tables. Instead, we hear about him doing what the apostles claimed they

were called to do: going out into the world as a missionary, witnessing for Jesus, proclaiming the gospel, and converting people to Christ. The usual explanation for this is that the church had one plan for Philip, but God had something else in mind and directed his life accordingly.

So we discover that Philip is the first missionary to travel to Samaria and preach the good news of the Jewish Messiah to people who had traditionally been the Jews' worst enemies (8:4–8). Philip cast demons out of sick people and healed the lame and the paralyzed. Filled with joy, the Samaritans accepted the word of God in droves and were baptized by Philip (8:9–13). Even Simon Magus, a prominent leader of occult arts, was baptized.

As a curious footnote to this story, we read that the Holy Spirit did not come upon the Samaritans until two of the twelve apostles, Peter and James, came to the area to confirm what had taken place. Apparently, it was important for prominent apostles to see this happen with their own eyes, since it was the first time that non-Jews had come to faith in Jesus and received the Spirit.

Next, Philip is guided by an angel to go stand by a road where he encounters an Ethiopian eunuch who is reading the Scriptures and seeking someone who can interpret Isaiah 53:7–8 for him. Starting with this passage, Philip proclaims the good news about Jesus to the Ethiopian and then baptizes him (Acts 8:26–39).

The Spirit of the Lord then snatches Philip away and he finds himself at Azotus, from which he travels to Caesarea, proclaiming the gospel in all towns along the way (8:40).

A final New Testament reference to Philip is in Acts 21:8–9, where he and his four unmarried daughters are visited by Paul. The daughters are all said to have the gift of prophecy. In the Bible “prophecy” can mean “predicting the future,” but most of the time it simply means “speaking words given by God” and so is a synonym for “preaching.” Thus the most likely meaning of Acts 21:8–9 is that Philip’s daughters, like their father, were able to proclaim the word of God.

10.17

The Twelve Disciples

All four Gospels indicate that Jesus had twelve disciples who had a privileged status among his many followers. Their names are given in the three Synoptic Gospels and in Acts, as indicated in this chart.

New Testament Lists of the Twelve Disciples

Matthew 10:2–4	Mark 3:16–19	Luke 6:13–16	Acts 1:13–14
Simon Peter	Simon Peter	Simon Peter	Peter
Andrew	James of Zebedee	Andrew	John
James of Zebedee	John of Zebedee	James	James
John of Zebedee	Andrew	John	Andrew
Philip	Philip	Philip	Philip
Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Thomas
Thomas	Matthew	Matthew	Bartholomew
Matthew	Thomas	Thomas	Matthew
James of Alphaeus	James of Alphaeus	James of Alphaeus	James of Alphaeus
Thaddaeus	Thaddaeus	Simon the Zealot	Simon the Zealot
Simon the Cananean	Simon the Cananean	Judas of James	Judas of James
Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot	(Judas Iscariot) (Matthias, cf. 1:26)

Eleven names appear on all four lists, but whereas Matthew and Mark list a disciple named Thaddaeus who is not found on the lists in Luke or Acts, the latter two books list a disciple named “Judas of James” (which could mean “son of James” or “brother of James”) who is not mentioned in Matthew or Mark.

Church tradition resolved this discrepancy by declaring Thaddaeus and Judas to be the same person, offering the not unreasonable

suggestion that this disciple went by the name Thaddaeus to avoid confusion with another disciple named Judas who was among the twelve. Modern scholars allow that this could have been the case but also note the possibility that changes in the personnel of the twelve might have been made at different times (so Thaddaeus could have among the twelve at one point and Judas of James at another point).

Interpreters also note the slight difference in the order in which the disciples are named, though there is a high degree of consistency in the various orderings. Notably, Peter is always listed first, and Judas Iscariot is always listed last.

The matter is complicated somewhat through consideration of John's Gospel, which mentions "the twelve" (6:67, 70–71; 20:24) but never provides a list. If one scours the entire book, the names of some of the twelve familiar from the Synoptics do appear: Andrew (1:40); Peter (1:42), Philip (1:44), Judas Iscariot (6:71), another Judas (14:22), Thomas (20:24–25), and "the sons of Zebedee" (21:2). But this would account for only eight of the twelve. John's Gospel does not mention Bartholomew, Matthew, James of Alphaeus, or Simon the Zealot. And it seems to speak of someone named Nathanael as though he is among the twelve (1:45–49; 21:2).

At some point in church history, ecclesiastic authorities sought to resolve the confusion by simply declaring (without any evidence) that Nathanael is the same person identified as Bartholomew in the other Gospels. That has seemed satisfactory to many Bible readers,

especially since would otherwise be known of Bartholomew and there would be no biblical stories of his exploits to read on August 24, the day assigned to him in the liturgical church year. Scholars are a harder sell and tend to regard the Bartholomew = Nathanael equation as a somewhat facetious attempt at harmonization. Maybe Nathanael was simply a friend of the disciples or, again, maybe the precise membership of “the twelve” changed over time.

Whatever the exact names of these disciples might have been, all four Gospels hold that the concept of “the twelve” is significant. This is no doubt because the number recalls the twelve tribes of Israel and so Jesus’s designation of a group of followers as “the twelve” was probably intended to symbolize the restoration of Israel that he hoped to effect. Indeed, Jesus is portrayed as promising his disciples that they will judge the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:30).

The significance of the number twelve is also evident in the story reported in Acts 1:15–26, where the early church feels a need to replace Judas Iscariot by selecting Matthias to fill out their number. This process does not continue, however: when James the son of Zebedee is killed (Acts 12:2), no effort is made to replace him. The apostle Paul knew about “the twelve” and, at least two decades before the Gospels were written, he referred to that entity as a group that could authenticate the church’s proclamation of Jesus’s resurrection (1 Cor. 15:5).

10.18

The Name of Jesus in the Book of Acts

In Acts the name of Jesus continues to convey the power and presence of the person who bore it.

First, people do things in the name of Jesus that Jesus himself would do were he still physically present on earth.

- They speak and teach in the name of Jesus (4:17–18; 5:28, 40; 9:27–28).
- They perform signs and wonders in the name of Jesus (4:30).
- They exorcize demons in the name of Jesus (16:18; cf. 19:13–17).
- They heal the sick in the name of Jesus (3:6, 16; 4:10).

The reader is expected to realize that it is actually Jesus doing these things: there is no real difference between Peter saying that someone is healed “in the name of Jesus Christ” (3:6) and his telling a person, “Jesus Christ heals you” (9:34).

Second, people receive divine benefits through the name of Jesus.

- Salvation is in the name of Jesus (4:12).
- Forgiveness of sins is received through the name of Jesus (10:43; 22:16).

These benefits are received by

- calling on the name of Jesus (22:16; cf. 2:21)
- having faith in the name of Jesus (3:16)
- being baptized in the name of Jesus (2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5; 22:16).

Third, the name of Jesus stands for him who bore it and makes him present.

- The “good news about . . . the name of Jesus” is the good news of Jesus (8:12).
- To invoke the name of Jesus is to invoke Jesus (9:14, 21).
- To praise the name of Jesus is to praise Jesus (19:17).
- To oppose the name is to oppose Jesus (26:9).
- To suffer for the name is to suffer for Jesus (5:41; 9:16).

The one essential difference is that the name of Jesus remains present and accessible in a way that Jesus himself does not (cf. 1:11; 3:20–21).

10.19

The Ministry of Peter in the Book of Acts

The principal events involving Peter in Acts seem to parallel key events in the life and ministry of Jesus as related in the Gospel of Luke.

Peter is filled with the Holy Spirit while praying (2:1–13; cf. 1:14).

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus is filled with the Holy Spirit while praying (3:21–22).

Peter preaches a sermon explaining why he and others have been filled with the Holy Spirit (2:14–40).

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus preaches a (short) sermon that explains why the Spirit of the Lord has come upon him (4:16–30). He claims that what has happened is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (from the book of Isaiah), just as Peter claims that the Spirit's descent on the apostles is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (from the book of Joel).

Peter heals a lame man in the name of Jesus and encounters trouble with the religious leaders (3:1–4:22).

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus gets in trouble with the religious leaders of Israel for the first time when he heals a man who cannot walk (5:17–26).

Peter raises a widow from the dead (9:36–43).

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus raises a widow's son from the dead (7:11–17).

Peter ministers to a gentile centurion (10:1–48).

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus ministers to a gentile centurion by healing his servant (7:1–10). Note that in both stories the question of whether it is appropriate for a Jewish man to enter the house of a gentile poses an obstacle that must be overcome.

Peter is criticized for associating with the wrong sort of people (11:1–18; 15:5).

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus is criticized by Pharisees for associating with the wrong sort of people (5:30; 7:39; 15:2). In the case of Jesus, the issue is eating with sinners; in the case of Peter, it is eating with Gentiles.

Peter is delivered from prison by an angel (12:1–9).

There is no exact parallel to this regarding Jesus in the Gospel of Luke, but if the tomb of Jesus is understood to be something like a prison, then there is an account of Jesus being freed from that prison (24:1–12). Note that both stories involve an angel who opens the enclosed space.

10.20

The Centrality of Jerusalem in Luke-Acts (Box 10.5)

Gospel of Luke

- The story opens in Jerusalem (in the temple) (1:5–8).
- Jesus is brought to Jerusalem as a baby (2:22–38).
- Jesus is in Jerusalem at the age of twelve (2:41–50).
- There is a ten-chapter journey to Jerusalem (9:51–19:40; see especially 9:51, 53; 13:22; 17:11; 18:31; 19:11, 28).
- Jesus weeps over Jerusalem (19:41–44; also 13:33–35).
- Resurrection appearances occur in and around Jerusalem (24:13, 18, 33, 41–43).
- The mission to all nations begins with Jerusalem (24:47).
- Jesus tells disciples to stay in Jerusalem (24:49).
- The story closes in Jerusalem (in the temple) (24:52–53).

See also 5:17; 6:17; 9:31; 10:30; 13:4; 21:20, 24; 23:28.

Book of Acts

- Jesus orders his disciples not to leave Jerusalem (1:4).
- The mission to the ends of the earth begins in Jerusalem (1:8).

- Believers gather for prayer and planning in Jerusalem (1:12–26).
- The Holy Spirit comes to 120 believers in Jerusalem (2:1–4).
- Peter preaches to residents of Jerusalem, and three thousand are saved (2:5–41).
- The Jerusalem church is an ideal community (2:42–47; also 4:32–37).
- There are five chapters on the church in Jerusalem (3:1–8:1; see especially 4:5, 16; 5:16, 28; 6:7).
- The Samaritan mission receives the endorsement of the Jerusalem church (8:14–25).
- Paul's newfound devotion to Christ is recognized by the Jerusalem church (9:27–30).
- Peter reports to Jerusalem concerning the baptism of gentiles (11:1–18).
- The Jerusalem church sends Barnabas to check on the gentile mission in Antioch (11:19–26).
- Antioch Christians fund relief ministry for Jerusalem (11:27–30; also 12:25).
- The council in Jerusalem decides on the controversy over gentile conversions (15:1–29).
- Paul promulgates the decision of the Jerusalem council (16:4).

- Paul reports back to Jerusalem after the second missionary journey (18:22).
- Paul reports back to Jerusalem after the third missionary journey (21:17).
- Paul is arrested and put on trial in Jerusalem (21:27–23:11).

See also 8:27; 9:2, 13, 21; 10:39; 13:13, 27, 31; 19:21; 20:16, 22; 21:4–13; 25:1, 3, 7, 9, 15, 20, 24; 26:4, 10, 20; 28:17.

10.21

How to Write Speeches (Thucydides) (Box 10.3)

In the book of Acts, Luke presents speeches by prominent church leaders. How did he know what the people said? About five hundred years before Luke wrote Acts, the Greek historian Thucydides wrote *History of the Peloponnesian War*. In the preface to that work he describes how he handled the difficult matter of reporting speeches:

With reference to the speeches in this history, some were delivered before the war began, others while it was going on; some I heard myself, others I got from various quarters; it was in all cases difficult to carry them word for word in one's memory, so my habit has been to make the speakers say what was in my opinion demanded of them by the various occasions, of course adhering as closely as possible to the general sense of what they really said. (1.22.1)¹

Many scholars believe that Luke followed a similar convention in reporting speeches in Acts. This would explain why there are no significant differences in vocabulary and style of the various speakers (or between the vocabulary and style of the speeches and the rest of Acts): Luke has relayed in his own words the “general sense” of what the speakers said.

1. Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, trans. Richard Crawley (London: J. M. Dent; New York, Dutton, 1910).

10.22

Prison Conditions in the Roman World

Types of Imprisonment

Although Ezra 7:26 lists imprisonment as one of several recognized forms of legal punishment, there are no clear references to imprisonment being imposed as a legal penalty in the New Testament. This is in keeping with Roman policies, which did not view the purpose of imprisonment as reform or punishment; imprisonment was simply a means to hold on to those awaiting judgment. Prisoners were held *before* trial; once a verdict was rendered, they might be executed, beaten, or sent into exile, but they would not normally be sentenced to more time in prison.

The New Testament does offer many examples of such pretrial imprisonment: Acts 4:3; 12:3–4; 16:23–24; 23:35; Philippians 1:7–26. The binding or chaining of Jesus before he was brought to Pilate may also reflect some sort of formal arrest procedures (Matt. 27:2; Mark 15:1). Paul's imprisoning of Christians (Acts 8:3) probably refers to his handing them over to the custody of synagogue authorities who would then administer the penalty provided for in Israel's law: a flogging of up to forty lashes (Deut. 25:1–3; 2 Cor. 11:24; Acts 22:19). Pretrial retention, however, could be easily abused and become, in effect, a means of punishment. This appears to have been the case with John the Baptist, for whom no trial was

scheduled (Mark 6:17–20), and with Paul, who was held without trial for two years in Caesarea (allegedly because the governor wanted a bribe to release him, or wanted to appease the Jews whom Paul had offended; see Acts 24:26–27). Debtors unable to pay their creditors were also imprisoned, sometimes in special debtors' prisons, until their debts were paid. Luke 12:58–59 makes precise reference to the “officers” who in Roman times had charge of such prisons (see also Matt. 5:25; 18:30).

Prison Conditions

Conditions in ancient prisons were often harsh. Most prisoners wore chains; their feet might be shackled, their hands manacled or even attached to their neck by another chain, and their movements further restricted by a chain fastened to a post. The existence of laws prohibiting chains that were too short or too restrictive indicates that such practices were employed often enough to merit regulation. The very word “chains” became a synonym for imprisonment. Some prisoners were also kept in wooden stocks, devices to restrain the feet, hands, or even the neck of an individual (see Acts 16:24).

Prisons were often very dark (see Isa. 42:7); the inner area of the prison mentioned in Acts 16:24 was probably without windows.

Although solitary confinement was known, prisoners generally were kept grouped together, accused and condemned, men and women alike. Overcrowding was not infrequent (Isa. 24:22). Prisons often had poor air circulation, a lack of hygienic facilities, rats and vermin,

and food of poor quality. Unscrupulous guards might at times use the withholding of food or even outright torture to extort money from prisoners or their relatives.

Although various rulers, especially in Roman imperial times, struggled to enact reforms to prevent the most severe abuses, the quality of prison life largely remained the responsibility of local officials, and conditions varied considerably from place to place. Somewhat ominously, Hebrews 13:3 speaks of “those who are in prison” in parallel with “those who are being tortured”; the two groups are apparently assumed to be the same.

Respectable individuals were sometimes accorded a form of “house arrest,” guarded by soldiers but allowed a relative measure of comfort and freedom. They could, for example, receive visitors and transact business while waiting for their case to come to court or be resolved. According to the book of Acts, something of this nature was the situation Paul experienced in Rome (28:16, 30–31). Paul, however, indicates in 2 Corinthians 11:23 that he has been imprisoned multiple times (cf. 2 Cor. 6:5), and that letter was written prior to his imprisonments in Jerusalem, Caesarea, and Rome, as reported in Acts 22–28. The exact circumstances or longevity of those imprisonments are difficult to determine. In Philippians 1:7, 13, Paul says that he is “in chains” (NRSV, “imprisonment”) but it is not known whether he means that literally or in a metaphorical sense (as

the NRSV assumes). Elsewhere, 2 Timothy 2:9 presents Paul as complaining that he has been “chained like a criminal.”

Whatever the conditions, imprisonment always brought social disgrace, casting aspersions on the person’s reputation and generating a significant loss of honor. This is clearly reflected in 2 Timothy 1:16, where Onesiphorus is singled out for praise as one who was not ashamed of Paul’s chain. In Philippians, Paul tries to turn the humiliation factor to his own ironic advantage: he will not truly be put to shame if his personal humiliation results in the exaltation of Christ (1:20). Likewise, 2 Timothy 2:9 affirms that, even if Paul is chained, the word of God is not.

All told, five New Testament letters are said to have been written from prison: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 2 Timothy, and Philemon. All of these are attributed to Paul; they are sometimes called the “captivity letters” and treated as a group.

10.23

Speaking in Tongues in Acts and 1 Corinthians

Speaking in tongues (in Greek, *glossolalia*) refers to the act of speaking in a language that is either incomprehensible or, at least, unknown to the speaker. The phenomenon of speaking in tongues played a prominent role in the life of some early Christian communities.

Speaking in Tongues in the Book of Acts

Acts 2 contains a narrative about the events of the first Pentecost after Jesus's resurrection. On that day, the apostles gathered together and, after hearing a sound like wind and seeing tongues like fire, they "began to speak in other languages [literally, "tongues"], as the Spirit gave them ability" (Acts 2:4). The author of Acts goes on to list various nationalities of persons who heard the apostles speak, noting that everyone heard them speaking in their own native languages.

The phenomenon of speaking in tongues is mentioned twice more in Acts:

- After Peter preaches in the house of Cornelius, the gentiles there began "speaking in tongues and extolling God" (10:46). This is taken as a sign that the Holy Spirit has been poured out among gentiles and that they should be baptized.

- In Acts 19, Paul meets some disciples of Apollos at Ephesus. These disciples, who have been baptized “into John’s baptism” (19:3), say that they have never heard of the Holy Spirit. Paul instructs them, baptizes them in the name of Jesus, and lays his hands on them. Then the Holy Spirit comes upon them and they speak in tongues and prophesy (19:6).

The author of Acts probably thought of these two incidents as similar to the one described in chapter 2, although in the latter incidents there is no explicit mention of people recognizing the inspired speech as actual languages.

Speaking in Tongues in 1 Corinthians 12–14

Paul addresses the matter of “speaking in tongues” as a possible problem in the church at Corinth. He acknowledges that the ability to speak in “various kinds of tongues” and the ability to interpret these tongues are spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:10), but he also advises his readers to seek “the higher gifts” (12:31), such as the ability to prophesy (14:1). In 1 Corinthians 13 Paul exalts love as the ultimate aim for all believers, and in 1 Corinthians 14 he gives a number of specific directions about speaking in tongues:

- Speaking in tongues is helpful to the community only when it is used in conjunction with the spiritual gift of “interpretation of tongues” (14:5; cf. 12:10).

- When the community convenes, no more than three should speak in tongues, each in turn, and there must be interpretations given (14:27).

Paul thinks that uncontrolled and uninterpreted speaking in tongues does not edify the community and that it gives outsiders the impression that believers are mad (14:23). Yet he allows this activity to take place, so long as it is done in orderly fashion and is accompanied by interpretation. Paul also encourages the believers to speak in tongues in private; indeed, he claims that he does this himself more than any of them (14:15–18).

Comparison of “Tongues” in Acts and in 1 Corinthians

Interpreters generally note two differences between the phenomenon of speaking in tongues as it is portrayed in Acts and that phenomenon as it is portrayed in 1 Corinthians.

First, the persons who speak in tongues in Acts appear to be miraculously inspired to speak in actual foreign languages that they themselves have never learned. In 1 Corinthians, however, the people speak in incomprehensible languages without any expectation that anyone would recognize their words as an actual language spoken on earth. Indeed, 1 Corinthians 13:1 suggests that the Corinthians might have identified this incomprehensible speech with the language of angels. The interpretation of tongues demanded

a spiritual gift, not mere recognition on the part of one who happened to know the language being spoken.

Second, the people who speak in tongues in Acts are reported as doing so only once, on the occasion of being filled with the Holy Spirit: there is no indication that Peter, Cornelius, or anyone else who speaks in tongues on one occasion ever does so again. In 1 Corinthians, however, those who have the gift of speaking in tongues are able to exercise that gift anytime they choose.

10.24

Stoning: A Form of Capital Punishment

Acts 7 records the stoning of Stephen, who is regarded as the first Christian martyr. The event is presented as one in keeping with judicial sentences stipulated in the Old Testament.

Stoning was a form of capital punishment. It consisted of pelting a human with rocks in a manner that would cause the person's eventual death. Hypothetically, it could be viewed as a merciful form of execution, since one or two large rocks could bring a quick demise. Little is known, however, of how the punishment was enacted in practice.

According to the Old Testament, most of the offenses punished by stoning were crimes against the sovereignty of God. These included blasphemy (Lev. 24:15–16; cf. 1 Kings 21:13; Acts 7:1–58), incitement to worship other gods (Deut. 13:6–10), worship of other gods (Deut. 17:2–7), worship of Molech by child sacrifice (Lev. 20:2–5), divination by mediums (Lev. 20:27), violation of the Sabbath (Num. 15:32–36), and violation of the taboo of devoted objects (Josh. 7:25). Stoning is also specified in cases of adultery (Deut. 22:21, 24; cf. John 8:3–7), filial insubordination (Deut. 21:18–21), and a goring ox who kills a person (Exod. 21:28–29).

A description of the procedure in judicial stoning may be gleaned from various references. The stoning usually took place outside the

city (Lev. 24:14; Num. 15:35; Deut. 17:5; 22:24; 1 Kings 21:13; but cf. Deut. 22:21). The criminal was probably stripped (Ezek. 16:39). The witnesses were the first to cast stones, followed by the entire community (Deut. 13:9–10; 17:7; cf. John 8:7). Accounts of nonjudicial stoning are recorded in 1 Kings 12:18; 2 Chronicles 24:21.

The custom continued into New Testament times, but there is no sure evidence that it was practiced as an official legal procedure. In addition to the account of the stoning of Stephen, the book of Acts reports that Paul was subjected to a stoning, which he survived—though he had been left for dead (14:19); Paul mentions the latter incident himself in 2 Corinthians 11:25. In the cases of both Paul and Stephen, however, the stoning is described as more of a spontaneous mob action than the result of a judicial process.

John 8:3–11 tells of an occasion when Jesus is asked whether the commandment of Moses requiring the stoning of an adulterous woman should be carried out. He replies, “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her” (8:7). The posing of the question in itself indicates that such a sentence was not automatic: indeed, Jesus’s interlocutors do not actually propose that the woman should be stoned; rather they seem to be presenting him with a test case regarding legal interpretation, to determine whether he favors strict applications.

10.25

Friendship and Sharing (Box 18.6)

“The proverb says, ‘the possessions of friends are shared’—and it says this correctly, for friendship consists in sharing, and siblings and comrades hold all things in common” (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 8.9.1–2).¹

“All who believed were together and had all things in common” (Acts 2:44).

1. Quoted in Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament*, 5th ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 341.

10.26

Acts 17:27–28—Paul Quotes the Pagans

In Acts 17, Paul quotes from two pagan poets and philosophers when addressing an audience in front of the Areopagus in Athens:

[God] is not far from each one of us. For “In him we live and move and have our being”; as even some of your own poets have said,

“For we too are his offspring.” (Acts 17:27–28)

First Quote: “In him we live and move and have our being”

No text containing these words has survived from antiquity, but Clement of Alexandria, John Chrysostom, and other authorities attributed the line to Epimenides, a seventh- or sixth-century-BCE philosopher-poet

In the early twentieth century, a ninth-century Syriac commentary on the book of Acts was discovered that contained the full quote from the text of Epimenides, which apparently was available to the author of that work at that time. The context seems to be an error (or “lie”) on the part of Cretans who, by building a tomb for Zeus, failed to recognize that the god was immortal

They fashioned a tomb for you, holy and high one,
Cretans, always liars, evil beasts, idle bellies.
But you are not dead: you live and abide forever,

For in you we live and move and have our being.

Of special note is the fact that this one stanza of ancient poetry is actually quoted *twice* in the New Testament. Paul cites the concluding line in Acts 17:28, while Paul's letter to Titus alludes to the second line in a completely different context:

It was one of them, their very own prophets, who said,

“Cretans are always liars, vicious brutes, lazy gluttons.”

(Titus 1:12)

Second Quote: “We too are his offspring”

Paul indicates that this line is something that more than one Greek poet has said, and we do possess two texts that contain similar lines:

All the streets and all the market places
of humanity are full of Zeus.
Also full of him are the sea and the harbors,
and everywhere we all have need of Zeus.
For we are also his offspring.

—Aratus of Soli in Cilicia, *Phaenomena* 2–5¹

The beginning of the world was from you,
and with law you rule over all things.
To you all flesh may speak,
for we are your offspring.
Therefore I will lift a hymn to you
and will sing of your power.

—Cleanthes, *Fragment 537*, “Hymn to Zeus”²

Both Aratus and Cleanthes were Stoic philosophers, fourth to third centuries BCE.

1. Quoted in Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament*, 5th ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 362.

2. Quoted in Gundry, *Survey of the New Testament*, 362.

10.27

Acts 19:23–41—Temple of Artemis

The temple of Artemis sat on a platform 400 feet long and 240 feet wide. The building itself was larger than a modern football field: 360 feet long and 180 feet wide. It had more than 120 columns, each of which was over 55 feet tall and gilded with gold and silver. A peaked roof rested atop the columns.

The temple that existed in New Testament times was actually the third one on that site. It had been constructed in the late fourth century BCE, the work having begun in 323. Literary sources describe the temple as being richly adorned with paintings and sculptures by some of the most renowned artists of antiquity.

In the second century BCE, Antipater of Sidon compiled a list of the seven wonders of the world, including the Temple of Artemis among them. He offers this comment:

I have set eyes on the wall of lofty Babylon on which is a road for chariots, and the statue of Zeus by the Alpheus, and the hanging gardens, and the colossus of the Sun, and the huge labor of the high pyramids, and the vast tomb of Mausolus; but when I saw the house of Artemis that mounted to the clouds, those other marvels lost their brilliancy, and I said, "Lo, apart from Olympus, the Sun never looked on aught so grand." (*Greek Anthology* 9.58)

The book of Acts reports that some Ephesians feared the temple could be endangered by the success of Christian evangelism:

About that time no little disturbance broke out concerning the Way. A man named Demetrius, a silversmith who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the artisans. These he gathered together, with the workers of the same trade, and said, "Men, you know that we get our wealth from this business. You also see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost the whole of Asia this Paul has persuaded and drawn away a considerable number of people by saying that gods made with hands are not gods. And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be scorned, and she will be deprived of her majesty that brought all Asia and the world to worship her."

When they heard this, they were enraged and shouted, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" The city was filled with the confusion; and people rushed together to the theater, dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul's travel companions. Paul wished to go into the crowd, but the disciples would not let him; even some officials of the province of Asia, who were friendly to him, sent him a message urging him not to venture into the theater. Meanwhile, some were shouting one thing, some another; for the assembly was in confusion, and most of them did not know why they had come together. Some of the crowd gave instructions to Alexander, whom the Jews had

pushed forward. And Alexander motioned for silence and tried to make a defense before the people. But when they recognized that he was a Jew, for about two hours all of them shouted in unison, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" But when the town clerk had quieted the crowd, he said, "Citizens of Ephesus, who is there that does not know that the city of the Ephesians is the temple keeper of the great Artemis and of the statue that fell from heaven? Since these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rash. You have brought these men here who are neither temple robbers nor blasphemers of our goddess. If therefore Demetrius and the artisans with him have a complaint against anyone, the courts are open, and there are proconsuls; let them bring charges there against one another. If there is anything further you want to know, it must be settled in the regular assembly. For we are in danger of being charged with rioting today, since there is no cause that we can give to justify this commotion." When he had said this, he dismissed the assembly. (Acts 19:23–41)

Acts of John, a second-century apocryphal book, includes a tale of the temple's destruction: the apostle John prayed publicly in the Temple of Artemis, exorcising its demons and "of a sudden the altar of Artemis split in many pieces . . . and half the temple fell down," instantly converting the Ephesians, who wept, prayed or took flight.¹ This, of course, did not actually happen: numerous sources describe the temple as intact for some time after the lifetime of John and other apostles.

In 262 CE, however, the Temple of Artemis was destroyed in a raid by the Goths, who set it aflame.

1. Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire AD 100–400* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1984), 26.

10.28

Acts 21:37–39—Mistaken for an Egyptian

A curious passage in the book of Acts indicates that a Roman tribune mistook Paul for some infamous Egyptian:

Just as Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he said to the tribune, “May I say something to you?” The tribune replied, “Do you know Greek? Then you are not the Egyptian who recently stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand assassins out into the wilderness?” Paul replied, “I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of an important city.” (Acts 21:37–39).

To whom does the Roman refer? Fortunately, the Jewish Roman historian Josephus offers us an account of the Egyptian that the Roman tribune has in mind. The event reported would have occurred in Jerusalem (where Paul is now being held) about three years prior to the events reported in Acts.

Moreover, there came out of Egypt about this time to Jerusalem one that said he was a prophet, and advised the multitude of the common people to go along with him to the Mount of Olives, as it was called, which lay over against the city, and at the distance of five furlongs. He said further, that he would show them from hence how, at his command, the walls of Jerusalem would fall down; and he promised them that he would procure them an entrance into the city through those walls, when they were fallen down. Now when Felix was informed of these things, he ordered

his soldiers to take their weapons, and came against them with a great number of horsemen and footmen from Jerusalem, and attacked the Egyptian and the people that were with him. He also slew four hundred of them, and took two hundred alive. But the Egyptian himself escaped out of the fight, but did not appear any more. (*Antiquities* 20.8.6)¹

1. Josephus, *Antiquities*, trans. William Whiston. *Project Gutenberg*, www.josephus.org.

10.29

The Apostles as “Ordinary Men” (Church Tradition)

Early church tradition often made much of the ordinary stature of the men whom Jesus called to be his twelve disciples and of their subsequent contributions to the transforming events that would establish Christianity as one of the empire’s foremost religions.

Origen (185–ca. 254):

Now we can see how in a short time this religion has grown up, making progress through the persecution and death of its adherents and through their endurance of confiscation of property and every kind of bodily torture.

And this is particularly remarkable since the teachers themselves were neither very skillful nor very numerous. For in spite of all, this word is being “preached in all the world” (Matt. 24:14), so that Greeks and barbarians, wise and foolish now are adopting the Christian religion.

Hence there can be no doubt that it is not be human strength or resources that the word of Christ comes to prevail with all authority and convincing power in the minds and hearts of all humanity.¹

Eusebius (263–339):

Reflect on the nature and grandeur of the one Almighty God who could associate himself with the poor and lowly fisherman's class. To use them to carry out God's mission baffles all rationality.

For having conceived the intention, which no one ever before had done, of spreading his own commands and teachings to all nations, and of revealing himself as the teacher of the religion of the one Almighty God to all humanity, he thought good to use the most unsophisticated and common people as ministers of his own design.

Maybe God just wanted to work in the most unlikely way. For how could inarticulate folk be made able to teach, even if they were appointed teachers to only one person, much less to a multitude? How should those who were themselves without education instruct the nations? ²

1. Origen, *First Principles*, trans. G. W. Butterworth (London: SPCK, 1936), 4:1.2.
2. Eusebius, *The Proof of the Gospel*, trans. W. J. Ferrar (London: SPCK, 1920), 3–5.

10.30

Possible Sources for Acts (Box 10.1)

- an Aramaic document describing the life of the early church in Jerusalem, used for chapters 1–12
- a collection of traditions from the church at Antioch, used for stories concerning Stephen and Barnabas (6:1–8:4; 11:19–30; 12:25–25:35)
- a travel diary, used for portions of the book recounting the journeys of Paul

10.31

The Community of Luke: Clues from the Gospel and Acts

The community includes Jews and gentiles:

Large conversions of both Jews and gentiles are depicted in

Acts (2:41; 4:4; 6:7; 11:20–21; 13:43; 14:1; 17:4; 18:8).

The agreement in Acts 15:19–20 is intended to facilitate

community fellowship between Jews and gentiles.

The community is urban:

The word “city” (*polis*) is used eighty-two times (thirty-nine in

Luke); the word “village” (*kōmē*) is used only thirteen times

(twelve in Luke).

The community includes people who are rich and poor:

A principal concern is how the rich should relate to the poor

(Luke 1:53; 12:31–34; 14:12–14; 16:19–31; 19:1–10; 21:1–4;

Acts 2:44–45; 4:32–35; 5:1–11; 9:36; 10:2, 4, 31).

The “rich” and the “poor” are mentioned more often than in any

other Gospel (Luke 6:20, 24; 7:22; 12:16–21; 14:21; 18:24–

27; 19:1–19).

The community is well organized:

Offices and position of community leadership can be discerned

(Luke 11:49; Acts 11:27–28; 13:1–3; 14:23; 15:32; 20:17; 21:10–11, 18).

The community faces trouble from without:

The Gospel speaks of persecution from Jews (Luke 6:22–23; 11:49–50; 21:12, 16).

The Gospel speaks of persecution from gentiles (Luke 21:12, 17).

The community faces trouble from within:

The Gospel speaks of people losing their faith and becoming apostate (Luke 8:13; 18:8).

The Gospel seeks to address the question of why the kingdom of God has not yet appeared (Luke 17:20–21; 19:11; cf. Acts 1:6–7).

At one time, most scholars believed that Luke wrote his books for a particular congregation in a specific geographical locale. The information given above was taken as descriptive of that “community” (wherever it was located). Today, most scholars think that Luke assumed that his works would be distributed throughout the Roman Empire. Thus the information given above is taken as more descriptive of a generic “community of readers”—the people whom Luke hopes to address through his Gospel and the book of Acts.

10.32

Potential Discrepancies between the Book of Acts and Paul's Letters (Box 10.2)

Many scholars claim that Luke's portrayal of Paul's life and theology does not agree with what Paul says in his letters. The following points are frequently raised:

- Paul says that he did not go to Jerusalem to consult with the apostles after his encounter with Christ (Gal. 1:15–18); Acts says that he did (Acts 9:10–30).
- Paul says that church leaders in Jerusalem endorsed his law-free mission to the gentiles and “added nothing” to it (Gal. 2:6–10); Acts says that they assigned Paul the task of promulgating a list of legal requirements for gentiles to keep (Acts 15:22–29).
- Paul claims that he lives like a gentile in order to win gentiles (1 Cor. 9:21); Acts presents Paul as utterly loyal to the law, never acting contrary to it (Acts 25:8; 28:17).
- Paul denounces reliance on Greek wisdom (1 Cor. 1:18–31); Acts presents him as friendly to philosophers and as drawing on Greek wisdom traditions to make common ground with them (Acts 17:22–31).
- Paul says that idol-worshippers are without excuse because knowledge of God has always been evident (Rom. 1:18–23);

Acts presents Paul as saying that God has overlooked the worship of idols as a consequence of ignorance (Acts 17:29–30).

Of course, the significance of all of these points is disputed, and some scholars offer explanations for the apparent discrepancies.

10.33

Acts 15:1–32—What to Do with Gentiles (Box 16.6)

Widespread conversion of gentiles forced the early Christian church to face several important questions. Robert Gundry lists these:¹

- Should gentile Christians be required to submit to circumcision and practice the Jewish way of life, as gentile proselytes to Judaism were required to do?
- To those gentile Christians unwilling to become wholly Jewish, should the church grant a second-class citizenship, as for gentile “God-fearers” in Judaism?
- What makes a person Christian: faith in Christ solely, or faith in Christ plus adherence to the principles and practices of Judaism?

1. See Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament*, 5th ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 388.

10.34

Acts 9—“Conversion” of Paul

One of the most persistent misunderstandings regarding the story of early Christians in the book of Acts is that the missionary who becomes known as the apostle Paul began his life with a different name: he was called “Saul” when he was the enemy of Christians but changed his name to “Paul” after he began proclaiming the faith he had once tried to destroy.

This was not actually the case. Like many Jewish people of his day, the man in question used one name in his interactions with Jews and another in his interactions with gentiles. A rough analogy would be a Mexican-American businessman being known as “Juan” among Mexican friends and as “John” in more Anglo settings.

Examples of the misunderstanding abound. For example, in Ralph Ellison’s 1952 novel *Invisible Man* (not a science fiction novel but an exploration of how African Americans in urban America are “unseen” by white Americans), the first-person narrator reflects on life:

“You start Saul, and end up Paul,” my grandfather had often said. “When you’re a youngun, you Saul, but let life whup your head a bit and you starts to trying to be Paul—though you still Sauls around on the side.”¹

Thus Ellison (or at least the narrator of his novel) seems to think “Saul” and “Paul” represent stages of development in a person’s life.

New Testament students know better. There was no “name change” and the Jewish missionary/apostle would have continued to be known as both Saul and Paul throughout his life.

Ellison does recognize that those who become “Paul” still remain “Saul” in certain respects—on that point, he is correct.

1. Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 381.

10.35

Acts 10:34–35—“No Respector of Persons” in American Democracy

In the book of Acts, Peter speaks to the gentile Cornelius, explaining God revealed to him in a vision: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him” (10:34–35).

In the KJV, the passage is translated: “Of a truth I perceive that God is no respector of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.”

The phrase “no respector of persons” from this one Bible verse became ingrained in the English language and was often cited as one of the foundations for American democracy.

In America, the law was expected to be exercised with the same perspective attributed by Peter to God.

James Fenimore Cooper (1789–1851): The novelist responsible for *Last of the Mohicans* and *The Deerslayer* presents a robust frontier character in one of his works as saying, “The law, gentlemen, is no respector of persons in a free country. It is one of the greatest blessings that has been handed down to us from our ancestors, that all men are equal in the eye of the law as they are be nater [nature]” (*The Pioneers*, chap. 13).¹

John Stuart Mill (1806–73): The political philosopher argues in favor of women’s rights: “It is held that there should be restraint not required by the general good, and that the law should be no respecter of persons, but should treat all alike” (*The Subjection of Women*, chap. 1).²

G. K. Chesterton (1874–1936): The British journalist exploits the double meaning the term “respect” can have in English (i.e., “regarding, concerning” or “courtesy, honor”) when he describes what he likes and doesn’t like about America: “Democracy is no respecter of persons. It is no respecter of them, either in the bad and servile or in the good and sympathetic sense” (*What I Saw in America*, “Facts and Opinions”).³

1. David Lyle Jeffreys, ed., *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 551.

2. Jeffreys, *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition*, 551.

3. Jeffreys, *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition*, 551.

11.0

Types of Letters and Their Different Functions

(Box 11.1)

Handbooks from the Greco-Roman world include instructions for writing different types of letters to accomplish different goals.

- *friendship*—shares memories and provides news between friends who are separated
- *prayer*—expresses the content of prayers said on the recipient's behalf
- *congratulations*—applauds the recipient for some accomplishment or honor
- *consolation*—expresses sympathy for those who have experienced suffering or loss
- *recommendation*—testifies to someone's abilities and/or character
- *inquiry*—requests information from the recipient
- *response*—responds to a letter of inquiry by supplying requested information
- *report*—informs the recipient of news that the sender deems relevant
- *supplication*—asks the recipient for some sort of favor

- *thanks*—expresses gratitude for a favor that has been promised or performed
- *excuse*—explains why the sender will not be able to do something that the recipient requested
- *didactic*—teaches the recipient about some topic
- *advice*—recommends one course of action over another
- *encouragement*—urges the recipient to be bold in pursuing some course of action
- *exhortation*—urges the recipient to avoid immorality and exhibit virtuous behavior
- *accusation*—claims that the recipient has an improper attitude or behavior
- *threat*—informs the recipient of consequences for behavior (especially if it continues)
- *defense*—seeks to defuse charges made against the sender by recipient or someone else
- *praise*—commends the recipient for exemplary behavior

The New Testament letters are longer than the letters that exemplify one or another of these types (but see Acts 15:23–29; 23:26–30).

They usually are thought to represent “mixed types” for which there was no specific category in the handbooks. Still, all the New Testament letters incorporate aspects of these various letter types

into their contents as they seek to accomplish the various functions that those types were intended to serve.

Indebted to David deSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 533–34.

11.1

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11.2

Hymns in New Testament Letters (Box 18.2)

The New Testament often mentions Christians singing hymns and spiritual songs (Acts 16:25; 1 Cor. 14:15, 26; Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19; Heb. 2:12; James 5:13). Still, it does not contain a songbook or hymnal comparable to the book of Psalms in the Old Testament. Instead we find liturgical materials woven into other books. Notable examples are found in the Gospel of Luke (1:46–55, 67–79; 2:14, 29–32) and the book of Revelation (1:5–6; 4:8, 11; 5:9–14; 7:10–12, 15–17; 11:15–18; 12:10–12; 15:3–4; 16:5–7; 19:1–8; 22:13). Some of the letters attributed to Paul also appear to draw on hymns from the early church. Here are some often-cited examples:

- Rom. 11:33–36: a doxology on the inscrutability of God
- 1 Cor. 13: an exposition on the superiority of love
- Eph. 1:3–14: a doxology on the redemptive work of God in Christ
- Eph. 5:14: a verse promising the life and light of Christ to believers
- Phil. 2:6–11: a doxology on the self-abasement and the ensuing exaltation of Christ
- Col. 1:15–20: an exposition on the person of Christ and God's work through him

- 1 Tim. 3:16: a short litany on the coming of Christ to earth and his return to heaven
- 2 Tim. 2:11–13: a promise that suffering for Christ leads to glory

11.3

What’s the Difference between a “Letter” and an “Epistle”?

Some biblical scholars have sought to make a distinction between letters and epistles. According to this distinction:

A “letter” represents an actual correspondence written on a particular occasion to address matters of the moment. Most people who write a letter do not imagine that the correspondence will be read by anyone other than those to whom it is addressed.

An “epistle” is a public treatise that uses the letter format to present an essay or homily intended for general reading.

With regard to the New Testament writings, Paul’s brief note to Philemon is said to be a classic example of a letter, whereas the exposition to the Hebrews is said to be an epistle.

Most modern scholars, however, do not find this sort of distinction to be very helpful: all twenty-one of the New Testament writings were targeted for specific contexts (like letters), but none of them was intended to be kept private or confidential. Today the terms “letter” and “epistle” often are used synonymously, with a recognition that all twenty-one books are public documents linked to particular audiences and particular occasions.

11.4

Authorship and Pseudepigraphy: Levels of Authenticity (Box 11.2)

1. *Literal authorship.* A church leader writes a letter in his own hand.
2. *Dictation.* A church leader dictates a letter almost word for word to an amanuensis.
3. *Delegated authorship.* A church leader describes the basic content of an intended letter to a disciple or to an amanuensis, who then writes the letter for the leader to approve and sign.
4. *Posthumous authorship.* A church leader dies, and his disciples finish a letter that he had intended to write, sending it posthumously in his name.
5. *Apprentice authorship.* A church leader dies, and disciples who had been authorized to speak for him while he was alive continue to do so by writing letters in his name years or decades after his death.
6. *Honorable pseudepigraphy.* A church leader dies, and admirers seek to honor him by writing letters in his name as a tribute to his influence and in a sincere belief that they are responsible bearers of his tradition.

7. *Forgery*. A church leader obtains sufficient prominence that, either before or after his death, people seek to exploit his legacy by forging letters in his name, presenting him as a supporter of their own ideas.

11.5

Pseudepigraphy and the Problem of Personal Reference

Many New Testament letters contain autobiographical references—specific allusions to the life circumstances of their presumed authors. This is a complicating factor when those letters are thought to be pseudepigraphical.

The letters attributed to Paul do not simply continue his teaching in a new vein; they offer travel plans, greetings to and from associates, news regarding various trials and triumphs, and other tidbits of information that would make little sense if Paul were not still alive and actually writing the letters himself (see, e.g., 2 Tim. 4:13). Likewise, the author of 2 Peter makes specific reference to the time that he stood on the mountain of transfiguration with Jesus (2 Pet. 1:17–18).

Some scholars think that such autobiographical references count against pseudepigraphy: the letters obviously are written by persons of high moral character who would not claim to be someone they are not; thus the letters must be authentic or else they would not contain such references.

Other scholars regard the references as a literary device intended to give the letters verisimilitude (i.e., a realistic air). The pseudonymous writer takes on the character of the named author, just as an actor

portrays a historical person in a play. The attempt is not to deceive the reader but rather to write as if the letter were being composed by the person whose name it bears.

Still others view the references as instances of well-intended deception, employing what the ancient world called a “therapeutic lie.” Throughout history, prominent church leaders (Origen, Jerome, Chrysostom) have maintained that mild deception is commendable if it serves a higher purpose, and granting apostolic authority to sound doctrine might have been thought to qualify as such a purpose.

Finally, some scholars think that these autobiographical references require the letters to be regarded as forgeries (if they are not authentic). Such features suggest deliberate subterfuge, which, had it been recognized, would have rendered the works unacceptable as Scripture.

11.6

Pseudepigraphy as an Affront to Religious Faith

Academic discussion of whether some New Testament letters are pseudepigraphical letters is complicated by confessional concerns and by different notions of what it means to view such writings as Scripture. For many Christians, including responsible and respected scholars, the notion that some writings of the New Testament are pseudepigraphical is an affront to religious faith.

The question is quite different from issues regarding authorship of the New Testament Gospels. Academic scholars question church traditions regarding the authorship of the Gospels, but the Gospels themselves are anonymous, and it is only traditions concerning them that are being challenged. With the letters, the challenge concerns what is said in the biblical books themselves: the disputed letters clearly state that they are written by Paul, James, Peter, or Jude, but some scholars think that they were not actually (or literally) composed by those individuals.

For some, the authority of the writings as Scripture is at stake.

Some Christians maintain that any letter that claims to be authored by a person who did not actually write it should be regarded as erroneous (if not deceptive) and, accordingly, ought not be accepted as Scripture. Even those who would consider such a judgment extreme often discover that, in practice, writings deemed

pseudepigraphical are regarded as less valuable or important than writings judged to be authentic. Thus the New Testament letters most often regarded as pseudepigraphical tend also to be the ones most neglected in biblical study; they are not rejected outright but, for some, they seem to become unofficially regarded as “second-tier scripture.”

Some Christians claim that an a priori confession of these writings to be Scripture rules out any possibility of them being pseudepigraphical. For example, J. I. Packer asserts that if the Pastoral Epistles (1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus) are regarded as Scripture, then “their claim to authorship [by Paul], like all other assertions, should be received as truth from God; and anyone who rejects this claim ought also to deny that they are Scripture.”¹

Academic discussion about pseudepigraphy can become stalled, hampered by an unusually high degree of suspicion and intimidation. Those who are opposed in principle to the notion of New Testament letters being pseudepigraphical may have little interest in the topic apart from learning arguments to refute what they take to be a troubling position. Interpreters who are open to the possibility that some writings might be pseudepigraphical are naturally frustrated by the prospect of debating such matters on academic grounds with people who are not likely to be persuaded by academic arguments. This frustration sometimes produces a backlash in academic circles, according to which arguments that

would be supportive of a position that is favored by some for confessional reasons get easily ignored or dismissed without regard for their intrinsic validity.

Within some circles, conformity to the conventional wisdom of the guild (particularly on matters challenging to those who hold resistant confessional postures) can come to be regarded as a test of an interpreter's level of commitment to true, unbiased scholarship. The guild's "conventional wisdom" can then become, in effect, a confessional position of another kind. Scholarship can become polarized along ideological grounds: interpreters may be labeled "conservative" or "liberal" and expected to defend the positions most amenable to the camp in which they have been placed (by peers or opponents).

These problems are real, but their scope and intensity can be exaggerated. The great majority of biblical scholars try to analyze the evidence for and against pseudepigraphy as fairly as possible. Most are also able to identify their own presuppositions and to note ways in which their stance or perspective might influence their evaluation of the data. Indeed, there are scholars who reject claims to pseudepigraphy even though their theological position would in no way necessitate such a decision, and there are scholars who admit that in certain cases an objective evaluation of data would favor a decision for pseudepigraphy even though their personal religious convictions prevent them from accepting that verdict.

1. J. I. Packer, *Fundamentalism and the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 184.

11.7

New Testament Epistles as a Source for Historical Jesus Studies

Surprisingly, the letters of Paul preserved in the New Testament tell us little more about Jesus than the non-Christian writings. The great Christian missionary did not know the earthly Jesus but says the risen Christ appeared to him (1 Cor. 15:8). Paul's thoughts are clearly guided by the belief that he and other Christians remain in a dynamic relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, who lives now in heaven with God but interacts with his followers on earth and will someday return to consummate their salvation. Most of Paul's references to Jesus are couched in present or future tenses. When he does use the past tense to refer to what we are calling the Jesus of history, he almost always refers to what he regards as the final events of that life—Jesus's death and resurrection. Once he also describes Jesus's last meal with his followers (1 Cor. 11:23–25).

Even though Paul does not explicitly relate stories about the life or ministry of Jesus or pass on much of his teaching, he may at times allude to sayings of Jesus.¹ The command of the Lord prohibiting divorce that Paul refers to in 1 Corinthians 7:10 might be a reference to the historical teaching of Jesus (cf. Mark 10:2–9). Likewise, Paul's claim that "the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel" (1 Cor. 9:14) may recall a

saying of Jesus such as that reported in Matthew 10:10.

Occasionally, Paul offers moral advice that may reflect the influence of words attributed elsewhere to Jesus without actually citing Jesus as his source (e.g., the exhortation to love one's enemies in Rom. 12:14,17–20; cf. Matt. 5:38–48). In other instances, however, Paul claims authority to give instructions “through the Lord Jesus” (1 Thess. 4:2), which may indicate that he believes he has received revelations from the risen Lord, and that people are to regard these words as similar to those spoken by Jesus when he was on earth. Whether or not this is the case, historians are cautious about taking everything Paul presents as “words of the Lord” as representative of the actual teaching of the historical Jesus.

Nevertheless, Paul's letters are regarded as an important source for what little they do reveal. This is primarily true because the letters are dated so early. By most estimates, Paul's letters were written some twenty to thirty years before the Gospels. Furthermore, despite the apparent lack of interest in Jesus's earthly life and ministry, details sometimes turn up almost by accident. For instance, Paul refers in 1 Corinthians 15:5 to “the twelve,” confirming the (later) report in the Gospels that some of Jesus's disciples were known by this designation. Elsewhere, Paul mentions that Jesus was of Davidic descent (Rom. 1:3).

Other New Testament letters offer even less information. Again, scholars note passages that may be reworked sayings of Jesus,

such as the prohibition of oaths in James 5:12 (cf. Matt. 5:34–37), but the epistles themselves do not attribute these sayings to Jesus. The anonymous letter to the Hebrews mentions that Jesus was of the tribe of Judah (7:14) and refers to an agonized prayer reminiscent of that which the Synoptic Gospels say he offered in Gethsemane (Heb. 5:7–8; see Mark 14:32–42). These letters, however, are probably not as early as Paul's, and may even depend on the Gospel traditions. Even the meager information they offer about Jesus is not deemed very valuable.

A few scholars have advocated for a much greater use of epistles in historical Jesus studies, albeit in a somewhat different manner. Apart from explicit references to the life or teachings of the man Jesus, the epistles bear robust witness to what people believed about Jesus. Sometimes, in the case of certain letters attributed to Paul, this testimony may be regarded as historical evidence of the early influence of Jesus, revealing how he was regarded by people just two or three decades after his death. Paul Barnett starts with the historical fact (evident in Paul's letters and other early Christian literature) that the first generation of Christians worshiped Jesus and proclaimed him to be both the long-awaited Messiah and the divine Son of God. Barnett argues on logical grounds that it would be historically unlikely for Christians to have come up with these things completely on their own—even if they believed he had been raised from the dead.

A more likely scenario would be for Christians who believed Jesus had been raised from the dead to conclude that claims he had made about himself had now been vindicated. Thus the early beliefs about Jesus evident in the epistles (and, for Barnett, in missionary speeches contained in the book of Acts) should be regarded as suggestive of claims the historical person made regarding his own identity and mission: the so-called Christ of faith is at least an indicator of the “Jesus of history.”²

1. One study of Paul’s possible use of quotations of Jesus is David L. Dungan, *The Sayings of Jesus in the Churches of Paul: The Use of the Synoptic Tradition in the Regulation of Early Church Life* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publisher, 1971).

2. See Paul Barnett, *Jesus and the Logic of History* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997); Paul Barnett, *Finding the Historical Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009). Likewise, but operating with a very different methodology, Bas van Os believes he can demonstrate that certain core beliefs in the undisputed letters of Paul “cannot be easily explained on the basis of contemporary Jewish or Hellenistic thinking” and so “could conceivably go back to Jesus” (*Psychological Analyses and the Historical Jesus: New Ways to Explore Christian Origins*, Library of New Testament Studies 432 [London: T&T Clark, 2011], 187).

12.0

Paul's Mission Sites

Listed below are areas of Paul's missionary work mentioned in his letters. Cities printed in italics are mentioned in Paul's "undisputed letters."

Province of Achaia

Romans 15:26; 1 Corinthians 16:15; 2 Corinthians 1:1; 9:2; 11:10;
1 Thessalonians 1:7–8; compare Acts 18:12; 19:21

Cities in the Province of Achaia

Athens (1 Thess. 3:1; cf. Acts 17:15–16; 18:1)

Cenchreae (Rom. 16:1; cf. Acts 18:18)

Corinth (1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1, 23; cf. 2 Tim. 4:20; Acts 18:1)

Province of Asia

Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; 2 Corinthians 1:8; compare
2 Timothy 1:15; Acts 16:6; 19:10, 22, 26, 31; 20:4, 16, 18; 21:27;
24:19; 27:2

Cities in the Province of Asia

Colossae (Col. 1:2)

Ephesus (1 Cor. 15:32; 16:8; cf. Eph. 1:1; 1 Tim. 1:3; 2 Tim. 1:18;
4:12; Acts 18:19, 21; 19:1, 17, 26; 20:16–17)

Hierapolis (Col. 4:13)

Laodicea (Col. 2:1; 4:13, 15–16)

Miletus (2 Tim. 4:20; cf. Acts 20:15, 17)

Troas (2 Cor. 2:12; cf. 2 Tim. 4:13; Acts 16:8, 11; 20:5–6)

Province of Crete

Titus 1:5

Province of Galatia

1 Corinthians 16:1; Galatians 1:2; cf. 2 Timothy 4:10; Acts 16:6;

18:23

Cities in the Province of Galatia

Iconium (2 Tim. 3:11; cf. Acts 13:51; 14:1, 19, 21; 16:2)

Province of Illyricum

Romans 15:19

Cities in the Province of Illyricum

Dalmatia (2 Tim. 4:10)

Province of Lycaonia

Not mentioned in Paul's letters; cf. Acts 14:6

Cities in the Province of Lycaonia

Lystra (2 Tim. 3:11; cf. Acts 14:6, 8, 21; 16:1–2)

Province of Macedonia

Romans 15:26; 1 Corinthians 16:5; 2 Corinthians 1:16; 2:13; 7:5; 8:1;
9:2; 11:9; Philippians 4:15; 1 Thessalonians 1:7–8; 4:10; compare
1 Timothy 1:3; Acts 16:9–10, 12; 18:5; 19:21–22; 20:1, 3

Cities in the Province of Macedonia

Philippi (Phil. 1:1; 1 Thess. 2:2; cf. Acts 16:12; 20:6)

Thessalonica (Phil. 4:16; 1 Thess. 1:1; cf. 2 Thess. 1:1; 2 Tim. 4:10;

Acts 17:1, 11, 13; 20:4; 27:2)

12.1

Chronology of Paul's Life (Box 12.4)

A number of factors make exact dates difficult to determine. Here we look at the earliest and the latest dates that are typically suggested by Pauline scholars.

	Earliest Date	Latest Date
Call to be an apostle of Christ	32	36
Initial time in Arabia and Damascus	32–35	36–39
First visit to Jerusalem	35	39
Interim years in Cilicia and Syria	35–45	40–45
Private meeting with church leaders	45	46
First missionary journey	46–48	46–49
Apostolic council	48	49
Second missionary journey (includes one and a half years in Corinth)	49–51	50–52
Third missionary journey (includes two and a half years in Ephesus)	52–57	54–58
Arrested in Jerusalem	57	58
Prisoner in Caesarea	57–59	58–60
Voyage to Rome	59–60	60–61
Prisoner in Rome	60–62	61–63
“Second career” (not recognized by most scholars)	62–64	63–67
Death	62	67

12.2

Chronology of Paul's Letters (Box 12.5)

	Earliest Suggested Date	Latest Suggested Date
First Missionary Journey <i>Galatians—if addressed to "South Galatia"</i>	46–48	46–49
Second Missionary Journey 1 Thessalonians 2 Thessalonians—if authentic	49–51	50–52
Third Missionary Journey <i>Galatians—if addressed to "North Galatia"</i> <i>Philemon—if from Ephesus</i> <i>and Colossians and/or Ephesians—if authentic</i> <i>Philippians—if from Ephesus</i> 1 Corinthians 2 Corinthians Romans	52–57	54–58
Prisoner in Caesarea <i>Philemon—if from Caesarea</i> <i>and Colossians and/or Ephesians—if authentic</i> <i>Philippians—if from Caesarea</i>	57–59	58–60
Prisoner in Rome <i>Philemon—if from Rome</i> <i>and Colossians and/or Ephesians—if authentic</i> <i>Philippians—if from Rome</i>	59–60	61–63
"Second Career" 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and/or Titus—if authentic	62–64	63–67
Death of Paul	62	67
The Post-Pauline Era 2 Thessalonians—if pseudepigraphic Colossians and/or Ephesians—if pseudepigraphic 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and/or Titus—if pseudepigraphic	62+	67+

12.3

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12.4

Words for Describing Humanity in Paul's Letters

When Paul talks about humans and the qualities of human life, he uses a number of different terms that do not always mean what we might think they mean.

Paul uses two words to refer to one's physical being: "body" (in Greek, *sōma*) and "flesh" (in Greek, *sarx*). His tendency is to use "body" in a neutral sense and "flesh" in a negative sense (what one is apart from God), but there are many exceptions (e.g., 2 Cor. 4:10–11).

Paul uses two words to refer to one's innermost being: "spirit" (in Greek, *pneuma*) and "soul" (in Greek, *psychē*). To English readers, "spirit" sometimes suggests something specifically religious, and "soul" suggests something more generic, but Paul uses the terms as synonyms. Both refer to the aspect of humanity that can be energized by God.

Paul uses two words to refer to the aspect of humanity that allows people to make conscious decisions: "mind" (in Greek, *nous*) and "heart" (in Greek, *kardia*). English readers might associate "mind" with intellectual activity and "heart" with emotional responses, but Paul uses the terms as synonyms.

See Joseph Fitzmyer, *Paul and His Theology*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1989), 82–84.

12.5

Effects of the Christ Event (Box 12.6)

One Pauline scholar sees Paul using ten different images for describing what God accomplished in Jesus Christ:

- *Justification*. People stand before God acquitted and righteous (Rom. 3:21–26)
- *Salvation*. People are rescued from evil and wrath (Rom. 5:9; Phil. 3:20)
- *Reconciliation*. People are placed in a right relationship with God and one another (Rom. 5:10–11; 2 Cor. 5:18–19)
- *Expiation*. People have their sins blotted out or wiped away (Rom. 3:25)
- *Redemption*. People are bought out of slavery to sin and death (Rom. 8:18–23; 1 Cor. 7:23)
- *Freedom*. People are set free from sin, law, and self to live as God intended (Rom. 8:2; Gal. 5:1)
- *Sanctification*. People are made holy (1 Cor. 1:2, 30; 6:11)
- *Transformation*. People are being changed into the image of God (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18)
- *New creation*. People are given a new life in a new age (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 2:20; 6:15)
- *Glorification*. People share in the glory of God (Rom. 8:18, 21, 30; 1 Thess. 2:12)

See Joseph Fitzmyer, *Paul and His Theology*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1989), 59–71.

12.6

Did Paul Have Bad Eyesight? (Box 16.3)

- He says that he suffered from a “physical infirmity” (Gal. 4:13) and from a “thorn” in the flesh (2 Cor. 12:7).
- He says that the Galatians would have given him their own eyes to help him had it been possible (Gal. 4:15).
- His handwriting is recognizable because of the exceptionally large letters that he makes (Gal. 6:11).
- He is said to have been temporarily blinded (Acts 9:8), and when his sight is restored, “something like scales” fall from his eyes (Acts 9:18).
- He fails to recognize the high priest when appearing before the Jewish council in Jerusalem (Acts 23:4–5).

Such considerations have led to speculation: Did he have cataracts or some other eye problem? Was he partially blind?

12.7

What Did Paul Look Like? (Box 12.3)

Church tradition offers no descriptions of the physical appearance of Jesus, but one second-century work does provide a description of Paul (*Acts of Paul and Thecla* 3):

Paul appeared to observers as “a man small of stature, with a bald head and crooked legs, in a good state of body, with eyebrows meeting and nose somewhat hooked.”¹

Is this accurate? The description is sufficiently early to be informed by actual memory and, furthermore, does not present a flattering portrait such as might suggest idealization. It also accords with passages from Paul’s letters that suggest his outward appearance was unimpressive (2 Cor. 10:10; Gal. 4:13–15). Martin Luther voiced his own (uninformed) opinion on this subject: “I think that Paul was a pathetic, ugly, and scruffy little man—like Philipp.” Luther apparently was referring to his friend Philipp Melanchthon.²

1. W. Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha*, trans. R. McL. Wilson (Louisville: Westminster Press, 1964), 2:354.

2. See Abraham Malherbe, “A Physical Description of Paul,” in *Paul and the Popular Philosophers* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 165–70.

12.8

Developing a Chronology for Paul

Problems with Developing a Chronology of Paul's Life

Neither Paul's letters nor the book of Acts specifies any dates for the events that they report.

Imprecise terms with regard to time intervals are used throughout the book of Acts (e.g., "for some time" in Acts 14:28; "for a considerable time" in Acts 18:18).

The book of Acts uses approximations that frustrate scholars desirous of more precision (e.g., Acts 19:8–10 indicates that Paul stayed in Ephesus for two years and three months, but Acts 20:31 seems to round off this number to three years).

Paul is ambiguous with temporal references: in Galatians 1:18–2:1, he says that he made his first visit to Jerusalem "after three years" and his second visit "after fourteen years." But does he mean that the first visit was three years after his encounter with Christ (1:15–16) or after his return to Damascus (1:17)? And what about the second visit? Was it fourteen years after the first visit? Or fourteen years after the encounter with Christ? Or fourteen years after the return to Damascus?

Promising Reference Points

Acts 22:3 indicates that Paul was educated in Jerusalem under Gamaliel, whose school flourished in that city from 20 to 30 CE.

Acts 7:58 says that Paul was a “young man” at the time of Stephen’s martyrdom.

Second Corinthians 11:32 places Paul in Damascus at a time when King Aretas had some influence in that city, which would fit well with the political situation during the years 37–41 CE.

Acts 18:1–2 indicates that Paul arrived in Corinth at a time when Claudius had “recently” expelled the Jews from Rome. Roman records indicate that this occurred in 49 CE.

Acts 18:12 says that Paul was in Corinth when Gallio was the proconsul, which position he held from the summer of 51 CE to the summer of 52 CE.

Acts 24:27 indicates that Paul was a prisoner in Caesarea at the time Festus replaced Felix as the Roman governor there. Records indicate this was in 59 or 60 CE.

Paul calls himself an “old man” in his letter to Philemon (v. 9).

Of these “promising reference points,” the mention of Gallio in Acts 18:12 has turned out to be the most useful. Scholars working out a chronology for Paul typically start with his time in Corinth (51–52) and work forward and backward from there.

Chronology for Paul’s Letters

Once we have developed a reasonable chronology for Paul's life, can we tell when his letters were written or in what order? These things can be determined with varying degrees of certainty for different letters.

The Seven Undisputed Letters

1 Thessalonians, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, and Romans

appear to have been written in that order during the 50s while Paul was engaged in what Acts presents as his second and third missionary journeys. First Thessalonians was written from Corinth toward the end of the second journey; the two Corinthian letters were written from Ephesus and Macedonia while he was on the third journey; the letter to the Romans was written from Corinth a few months later on that same trip.

Philippians and **Philemon** were written from prison, which suggests to many that they were written near the end of Paul's life, when he was imprisoned in Caesarea or, more likely, in Rome. Many scholars, however, think that the letters might have been written earlier, during some imprisonment not mentioned in Acts. The most popular of these alternative suggestions holds that either or both letters might have been written during that prolific third missionary journey, assuming that Paul spent some time in prison during his long tenure in Ephesus (cf. 1 Cor. 15:32; 2 Cor. 1:8–11). Discussion of all of these options continues, but the best time period for these two letters remains uncertain.

Galatians is the most difficult of the undisputed letters to date. It does not fit obviously or easily into any part of Paul's itinerary narrated in the book of Acts, and there is uncertainty as to whether the letter is addressed to a northern or southern region. Scholars who think that it is addressed to "South Galatia" tend to date it early, at the conclusion of the first missionary journey (making it the earliest of all Paul's extant letters). Those who think that it is addressed to "North Galatia" place it later, perhaps around the time of Romans.

The Six Disputed Letters

Chronology of the "disputed letters" depends on whether those letters are viewed as authentic or pseudepigraphical.

If **2 Thessalonians** is considered to be authentic, it is usually thought to have been written shortly after 1 Thessalonians (i.e., near the end of the second missionary journey).

If **Ephesians** and/or **Colossians** are considered to be authentic, they usually are grouped with Philemon and considered to come from a period close to the time when that letter was written (but the date of that letter—which imprisonment?—remains in dispute).

If **1 Timothy**, **2 Timothy**, and/or **Titus** are considered to be authentic, they often are thought to stem from the time of a "second career" that Paul is presumed to have had following his Roman imprisonment. In particular, 2 Timothy would be seen by those who

consider the letter to be authentic as coming from a time close to Paul's execution by the Roman authorities.

When any or all of these letters are considered to be pseudepigraphical, they are viewed as coming from a time after Paul's death.

12.9

Sources for Studying Paul's Life and Thought

(Box 12.1)

We have four sources for reconstructing Paul's life and thought:

- *seven undisputed letters*, acknowledged to have been written by Paul (Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, Philemon)
- *six disputed letters*, believed by some but not by all to have been written by Paul (Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus)
- *the book of Acts*, much of which was written about Paul a couple of decades after his death
- *traditions* from church history

The Primary Source

The undisputed letters are the most important of our sources, for in them we have what everyone agrees to be Paul's own statements about his life and thought. Still, since these letters are directed to specific occasions, we read only about topics that needed to be addressed. If the Corinthian church had not experienced problems with regard to its celebration of the Lord's Supper (which Paul deals with in 1 Cor. 11), we would not know that Paul believed in that ritual or had any opinions about it one way or the other. Are we ignorant of

other matters simply because no crises arose prompting Paul to comment on them?

Secondary Sources

The disputed letters can be an additional source for learning about Paul, but they are used sparingly in academic scholarship for the simple reason that whatever claims are made on the basis of what is said in these letters may not be accepted by those scholars who regard the works as pseudepigraphic. A similar caution holds for use of the book of Acts, since many scholars think that Luke's presentation of Paul in that book is colored by his own priorities and concerns. Church traditions regarding Paul are evaluated on an individual basis: some are taken seriously as preserving probable facts, while others are dismissed as conveying unverifiable legends.

12.10

Paul's "Conversion": A Change of Heart and Mind

(Box 12.2)

Although Paul continued to regard himself as a loyal Jew and Pharisee after his encounter with the risen Christ, he does seem to have changed his thinking about some matters.

- *Jesus*. Paul had considered Jesus to be a false messiah; after his encounter he viewed Jesus as the true Messiah and, indeed, the Son of God (2 Cor. 1:19; Gal. 2:20).
- *The last days*. Paul had believed that God's Messiah would put an end to the old age of evil and initiate a new age of righteousness; after, he decided that this would occur in stages: the new age (ripe with possibility) had begun with the resurrection of Jesus, but the old age (with all its attendant problems) would continue until Jesus returned (Rom. 16:25; 1 Cor. 10:11; Gal. 1:4).
- *The cross*. Paul had considered death by crucifixion to be a shameful sign that one was cursed by God (Gal. 3:13); after, he understood the crucifixion of Jesus as a voluntary sacrifice that reconciled sinners with God (Rom. 5:6–10; Phil. 2:8).
- *The law*. Paul had believed that the law (Jewish Torah) kept people in a right standing with God (Gal. 2:16; 3:12); after, he decided that the law only revealed the extent of people's

enslavement to the power of sin—a power that must be broken by Christ (Rom. 3:20b; 7:7–12).

- *Gentiles*. Paul had believed that gentiles were outside the covenant that God had made with Israel; after, he believed that gentiles and Jews were united as the people of God in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:28).
- *Circumcision*. Paul had believed that circumcision was the rite through which people became part of Israel, an exclusive community of God's chosen people (Phil. 3:3–5); after, he believed that baptism was the rite through which people became part of the church, an inclusive community of Jews and gentiles put right with God through faith (Rom. 6:4).
- *Persecution*. Paul had considered his violent persecution of the church to be an indication of zeal for his religion (Phil. 3:6); after, he viewed Jewish hostility toward the church as sinful opposition that would incur God's wrath (1 Thess. 2:14–16).

12.11

The New Perspective on Paul (Box 12.7)

Toward the end of the twentieth century a revolution in Pauline studies brought to the fore an understanding of Paul's theology, called the "new perspective." Basically, this view maintains that when Paul talks about justification "by faith apart from works prescribed by the law" (Rom. 3:28), his main point is not that people are put right with God through faith rather than through their own effort or obedience; his main point is that people can be put right with God without abiding by the legal codes that marked Israel as God's chosen people. Thus he is not so much contending against "works righteousness" as he is rejecting "ethnic privilege."

12.12

The New Perspective on Paul: A Brief Essay

Toward the end of the twentieth century, a revolution in Pauline studies brought to the fore an understanding of Paul's theology called the "new perspective."¹ This terminology assumes that there was an "old perspective" on Paul (though, of course, no one ever called it that at the time).

The discussion concerns an assessment of Paul's belief in "justification by grace" and of the importance that this had for his understanding of his own life and theology. The theme of justification by grace is prominent in two of Paul's letters (Romans, Galatians): Paul insists that people are put in a right relationship with God at God's initiative, as a result of God's mercy and love rather than because of anything that they have done to earn God's favor. The Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century produced an understanding of Paul that focused on this motif in two ways.

First, the Reformers saw justification by grace as the center of Paul's thought; all the other things that he said could be regarded as implications of this one fundamental concept. Second, the Reformers understood justification by grace to be the doctrine that separated Paul from the Judaism of his day, which taught some form of "works righteousness" (i.e., the notion that people gain a right standing with God by doing good works and being obedient to God's

commandments). Thus the “old perspective” on Paul was that he was converted from a legalistic Pharisaism that told him that he had to earn favor with God to a grace-oriented Christianity that told him that God accepted him just as he was. He was converted from a religion of guilt to a religion of love.

This understanding of Paul went virtually unchallenged for four hundred years, and then scholars began to question some of its key presuppositions. First, scholars asked whether it is proper to make justification by grace so central to Pauline thought. He does not mention it at all in several of his letters, and in the critical sections where it is discussed, his primary purpose seems to be defending the rights of gentiles as full heirs of God’s promises to Israel.² The specific question for Paul was whether gentile converts must accept the Jewish law in order to become part of God’s chosen people, and what he says about justification by grace must be understood in that context.³

Second, a number of scholars have insisted that the Pharisaism of Paul’s day was not in fact a legalistic religion of works righteousness. The Pharisees believed that they stood in a right relationship with God through grace, on account of God’s covenant with Israel. They did not believe that they had to keep the law in order to earn God’s favor; rather, they delighted in keeping the law as a way to observe the covenant that God had made with them. Furthermore, Paul never indicates that he found his pre-Christian life burdensome, nor does

he refer to his life prior to his encounter with Christ as a time when he felt the need to attain salvation through his own efforts or merit (cf. Phil. 3:6).⁴

Separate and Exclusive

The new perspective suggests that Paul's ongoing conflict with his Jewish contemporaries concerned tendencies not toward legalism but rather toward separatism and exclusivism. God had revealed to Paul that, through Christ, salvation was available to all humanity. Thus Paul objected to "works of the law" not because they were construed as good works that could earn God's favor but, rather, because they were regarded as marks of ethnic privilege. Circumcision, dietary regulations, Sabbath laws, and the like were intended to set Israel apart from other nations so that Israel might remain God's elite chosen people.

According to the new perspective on Paul, justification by grace in itself was not a new concept; the Jews had always believed that they were justified by grace through God's covenant with Israel. What was new in Paul's gospel was that justification by grace now came through faith in Jesus Christ, and this claim had radical implications for all humanity: it was no longer exclusive to Israel. The controversial point in Paul's teaching was not the basic idea of people being put right with God through grace rather than through works; the controversial point was that gentiles could now become equal partners with Jews as part of the people of God.

New Perspective on Paul: An Example

What does this verse mean?

For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law. (Rom. 3:28)

Traditional Interpretation

People are put right with God by trusting in what God has graciously done through Jesus Christ rather than by doing things that would earn God's favor. In this view, "works of the law" = meritorious acts of human achievement (keeping commandments, performing good works, etc.).

New Perspective

People are put right with God by trusting in what God has graciously done through Jesus Christ rather than by being faithful to the covenant that God made with Israel. In this view, "works of the law" = covenant markers that identify Jews as belonging to God's chosen nation (circumcision, Sabbath observance, dietary restrictions, etc.).

This new perspective on Paul has met with widespread acceptance and has altered the way many scholars understand various matters that come up in Paul's letters.⁵ Many interpreters think the new perspective offers a more authentic way of understanding Paul's writings, reading them in light of first-century conflicts between Jews and gentiles rather than in light of sixteenth-century conflicts between Protestants and Roman Catholics.

Some critics, however, caution that the “new perspective” has gone too far.⁶ They maintain that some Jews in the first century did indeed view obedience to the law as a means to earn God’s favor (just as some Christians in every age have thought this) and that part of Paul’s emphasis on grace is directed against such notions (Rom. 4:4–5; 10:3).⁷ More to the point, some scholars claim that the new perspective on Paul shifts the primary focus of Paul’s concern from a vertical emphasis on how people relate to God to a horizontal emphasis on how God’s people relate to one another. Critics of the new perspective grant that Paul addresses manifold questions of how Jews and gentiles should relate to one another, but they claim that these are only the implications of a fundamental concern for how all human beings (Jew or gentile) are brought into a right relationship with God. Thus justification by grace is not important to Paul just as a means to an end, the end being reconciliation of humanity; it is, in itself, of primary importance, and the reconciliation of humanity follows as an inevitable consequence.

Discussion of these matters will continue. The debates (What is primary? What is secondary?) may seem somewhat pedantic to beginning students, but decisions on such matters do end up affecting interpretation of individual Bible passages, which in turn affect the preaching and teaching of Scripture in various Christian communities.

1. James D. G. Dunn is credited with coining the phrase “new perspective on Paul” during a 1982 lecture now published as “The New Perspective on Paul,” in *Jesus*,

Paul, and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1990), 123–33. See also James D. G. Dunn, *The New Perspective on Paul*, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2007).

2. See Krister Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976).

3. E. P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (London: SCM, 1983), 20.

4. See E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977).

5. Well-known advocates include James D. G. Dunn, E. P. Sanders, and N. T. Wright. See also Terence L. Donaldson, *Paul and the Gentiles: Remapping the Apostle's Convictional World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997); Francis Watson, *Paul, Judaism, and the Gentiles: Beyond the New Perspective*, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007).

6. For a good summary of the criticisms, see D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 375–85. See also Seyoon Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective: Second Thoughts on the Origin of Paul's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); Timo Laato, *Paul and Judaism: An Anthropological Approach*, trans. T. McElwain, SFSHJ 115 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995); Thomas R. Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment: A Pauline Theology of Law* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1993); Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003); and the essays collected in D. A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien, and Mark O. Seifrid, eds., *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001–4).

7. See Mark Seifrid, *Christ, Our Righteousness: Paul's Theology of Justification*, NSBT (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000); Mark Seifrid, *Justification by Faith: The Origin and Development of a Central Pauline Theme*, NovTSup 68 (Leiden: Brill, 1992); Peter Stuhlmacher, *Revisiting Paul's Doctrine of Justification: A Challenge to the New Perspective* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

12.13

Paul in Christian Legends (Box 15.3)

Throughout the centuries, many speculative legends about Paul have been inspired by comments that he makes in 2 Corinthians.

- *Short of stature.* Second Corinthians 10:10 says that Paul had a weak bodily presence. A common tradition took this to mean that he was unusually short. Paul's very name comes from a Latin word (*paulus*) meaning "small," and this may have helped to feed traditions about his height. In any case, John Chrysostom (fourth century) called Paul "the man of three cubits," identifying him as only four feet, six inches tall. Medieval artwork typically portrays Paul as the shortest man in a painting or scene.
- *Thorn in the flesh.* Second Corinthians 12:7–10 refers to an unidentified affliction from which Paul suffered as his "thorn in the flesh." What was this problem? One second-century writing says that Paul was congenitally bowlegged. Tertullian (second–third centuries) says that Paul had chronic headaches. Clement of Alexandria (second–third centuries) suggests that Paul may have had a difficult wife (although 1 Cor. 7:7 indicates that he was unmarried). John Chrysostom (fourth–fifth centuries) thought that the thorn was Alexander the coppersmith (see 2 Tim. 4:14) or one of Paul's other opponents. Martin Luther and John Calvin thought that

Paul might be referring metaphorically to sexual temptations that he experienced as a result of his commitment to celibacy. Others have suggested a guilty conscience over persecuting the church (see 1 Cor. 15:9) or anguish over Jewish rejection of the gospel (see Rom. 9:1–3). Still others have suggested a speech impediment (to explain 2 Cor. 10:10) or poor eyesight (to explain Gal. 4:15; 6:11) or epilepsy (to explain Acts 9:3–4). A few have even proposed that Paul was possessed by a demon (taking the words “messenger of Satan” in 2 Cor. 12:7 literally).

- *Spirit journeys.* Second Corinthians 12:2–4 relates a visionary experience in which Paul (describing himself in the third person) was transported to heavenly realms. Many apocryphal tales report additional “spirit journeys” undertaken by Paul. A Greek writing from the third century tells of how he visited hell and brokered a deal for all torments to be suspended for one day each week (on Sundays); thus even the damned have Paul to thank for getting them a day off.

13.0

Romans: Outline of Contents

- I. Introduction (1:1–17)
 - A. Salutation (1:1–7)
 - B. Thanksgiving (1:8–15)
 - C. Summary of Paul’s gospel (1:16–17)
- II. Wrath now revealed on all (1:18–3:20)
 - A. Gentiles under the power of sin (1:18–32)
 - B. Jews under the power of sin (2:1–29)
 - C. Objection (3:1–8)
 - D. Judgment on both Jews and Greeks (3:9–20)
- III. Righteousness now revealed to all (3:21–4:25)
 - A. Righteousness by faith to all, Jews and gentiles (3:21–31)
 - B. Scripture proof: Abraham made righteous by faith (4:1–25)
- IV. The life of righteousness by faith (5:1–8:39)
 - A. God’s righteousness through Jesus Christ (5:1–11)
 - B. The way Jesus mediates God’s righteousness (5:12–21)
 - 1. Sin and death through first Adam (5:12–14)
 - 2. Acquittal, life, and grace through Christ (5:15–21)
 - C. Replies to objections that grace fosters immorality (6:1–8:39)

1. If grace overcomes sin, why not sin more to receive more grace? (6:1–7:6)
 - a. Response: Can the baptized behave in the ways of the old life? (6:1–14)
 - b. Response: Can a freed slave still serve an old master? (6:15–23)
 - c. Response: Can a widow who remarries return to her deceased husband? (7:1–6)
 2. Objection: If a believer is liberated from the law, is the law therefore sinful (7:7)? Response: a heart corrupted by sin, not the law, is sinful (7:7–25)
 3. The believer is not lawless but walks by the Spirit in love (8:1–39)
- V. Objection: Why be a Jew? and Paul's answer (9:1–11:36)
- A. To Israel belong special privileges (9:1–5)
 - B. Israel's rejection, even if final, is not a failure on God's part (9:6–13)
 - C. God's selection of gentiles, even if arbitrary, is not unjust (9:14–29)
 - D. God's selection is not arbitrary: everyone, Jew or gentile, who turns to God will be saved (9:30–10:21)
 - E. The Jewish rejection is not final (11:1–32)

1. A remnant has accepted the gospel (11:1–6)
 2. God uses the rejection of Jews (11:7–24)
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- F. Doxology of praise to God (11:33–36)
- VI. God's righteousness in the daily life of the believer (12:1–15:13)
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 - F. Weak and strong in Rome (14:1–15:13)
- VII. Paul's travel plans (15:14–29)
- VIII. Conclusion (15:30–33)
- IX. Appendix: recommendation, greetings, warning against false teachers (16:1–23)
- X. Letter closing (16:25–27)

Courtesy of *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, ed. Mark Allan Powell (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 889.

13.1

Romans in the Revised Common Lectionary

Text	Series	Liturgical Occasion	Calendar Date
1:1–7	A	Advent 4	1 Sunday before Dec. 25
1:16–17; 3:22b–28	A	Lectionary 9	May 29–June 4
4:1–5, 13–17	A	Lent 2	5 Sundays before Easter
4:13–25	B	Lent 2	5 Sundays before Easter
4:13–25	A	Lectionary 10	June 5–11
5:1–5	C	Holy Trinity	9 Sundays after Easter
5:1–8	A	Lectionary 11	June 12–18
5:1–11	A	Lent 3	4 Sundays before Easter
5:12–19	A	Lent 1	6 Sundays before Easter
6:1b–11	A	Lectionary 12	June 19–25
6:12–23	A	Lectionary 13	June 26–July 2
7:15–25a	A	Lectionary 14	July 3–9
8:1–11	A	Lectionary 15	July 10–16
8:6–11	A	Lent 5	2 Sundays before Easter
8:12–17	B	Holy Trinity	9 Sundays after Easter
8:12–25	A	Lectionary 16	July 17–23
8:14–17	C	Pentecost	8 Sundays after Easter
8:22–27	B	Pentecost	8 Sundays after Easter
8:26–39	A	Lectionary 17	July 24–30
9:1–5	A	Lectionary 18	July 31–Aug. 6
10:5–15	A	Lectionary 19	Aug. 7–13
10:8b–13	C	Lent 1	6 Sundays before Easter
11:1–2a, 29–32	A	Lectionary 20	Aug. 14–20
12:1–8	A	Lectionary 21	Aug. 21–27

12:9–21	A	Lectionary 22	Aug. 28–Sept. 3
13:8–14	A	Lectionary 23	Sept. 4–10
13:11–14	A	Advent 1	4 Sundays before Dec. 25
14:1–12	A	Lectionary 24	Sept. 11–17
15:4–13	A	Advent 2	3 Sundays before Dec. 25
16:25–27	B	Advent 4	1 Sunday before Dec. 25

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13.3

Some Key Verses in Romans (Box 13.5)

These passages underscore some of the key points Paul makes in his letter to the Romans.

- “I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith” (1:16).
- “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (3:23).
- “The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (6:23).
- “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (8:1).
- “We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose” (8:28).
- “I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (8:38–39).
- “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds” (12:2).
- “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (12:21).

13.4

Phoebe, Prisca, Junia (Box 13.4)

The number and prominence of the women mentioned in Romans 16 is striking: ten are mentioned in verses 1, 3, 6, 7, 12, 13, 15. Three of these are especially noteworthy:

- *Phoebe*. Paul sends the letter with her and commends her to the congregation. He identifies her as a deacon in her home church and a benefactor of many (16:1–2).
- *Prisca*. She is singled out as one who, along with her husband, risked her life for Paul and earned the thanks of all churches of the gentiles (16:3). We hear of her elsewhere (Acts 18:2, 18, 26; 1 Cor. 16:19; 2 Tim. 4:19).
- *Junia*. She is said to be “prominent among the apostles” (16:7). Nineteenth-century scholars, perhaps unable to believe that Paul could have called a woman an apostle, treated the accusative *Iounian* in the Greek text as a form not of the female name “Junia” but of a male name “Junias”—a name for which there is no ancient evidence.

13.5

Christianity Comes to Rome (Box 13.2)

We don't know when or how the Christian faith took root in the city of Rome, though for many centuries that city would serve as a focal point and virtual headquarters for the Christian religion. Two of our earliest references to Christianity in Rome offer different views on the phenomenon:

“Your faith is proclaimed throughout the world”; “you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another.”

—Paul (Rom. 1:8; 15:14)

“A most mischievous superstition . . . broke out . . . in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular.”

—Tacitus (*Annals* 15.44)

Complete Works of Tacitus, trans. Alfred John Church, William Jackson Brodribb (New York: Modern Library, 1942).

13.6

Romans 5:12–19—The Sin of Adam in Romans and 2 Esdras

Romans

The free gift is not like the effect of the one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. If, because of the one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. (Rom. 5:16–19)

2 Esdras 7

Similar but more despairing reflections on the effects of Adam's sin are found in a Jewish writing from about the same time period:

It would have been better if the earth had not produced Adam, or else, when it had produced him, had restrained him from sinning. For what good is it to all that they live in sorrow now and expect punishment after death? O Adam, what have you done? For

though it was you who sinned, the fall was not yours alone, but ours also who are your descendants. For what good is it to us, if an eternal age had been promised to us, but we have done deeds that bring death? And what good is it that an everlasting hope has been promised us, but we have miserably failed? Or that safe and healthful habitations have been reserved for us, but we have lived wickedly? (2 Esdras 7:116–20//4 Ezra 6:46–50)

The book from which this writing is quoted is variously called 2 Esdras or 4 Ezra. It is not one of the books regarded as deuterocanonical by the Roman Catholic Church nor is it recognized as belonging to the Apocrypha by Protestant Christians. It is, however, regarded as scriptural by the Slavonic Orthodox Church, which calls it “3 Esdras” due to a unique system of nomenclature.

13.7

Romans 12:4–5—One Body, Many Parts

Paul uses the image of “one body with many parts” in two of his letters. In Romans he simply states the analogy: “For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another” (Rom. 12:4–5).

In 1 Corinthians he develops the image further:

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” On the contrary,

the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

(1 Cor. 12:12–27)

Notably, the Roman historian Livy (59 BCE–17 CE) reports an incident in which a spokesperson for the Senate told a fable of uncooperative body parts to persuade plebeians into accepting the leadership of the patricians.

The Senate decided, therefore, to send as their spokesperson Menenius Agrippa, an eloquent man, and acceptable to the plebs as being himself of plebeian origin. He was admitted into the camp, and it is reported that he simply told them the following fable in primitive and uncouth fashion:

“In the days when all the parts of the human body were not as now, agreeing together, but each member took its own course and spoke its own speech, the other members, indignant at seeing that everything acquired by their care and labor and

ministry went to the belly, whilst it, undisturbed in the middle of them all, did nothing but enjoy the pleasures provided for it, entered into a conspiracy; the hands were not to bring food to the mouth, the mouth was not to accept it when offered, the teeth were not to masticate it. Whilst, in their resentment, they were anxious to coerce the belly by starving it, the members themselves wasted away, and the whole body was reduced to the last stage of exhaustion. Then it became evident that the belly rendered no idle service, and the nourishment it received was no greater than that which it bestowed by returning to all parts of the body this blood by which we live and are strong, equally distributed into the veins, after being matured by the digestion of the food.”

By using this comparison, and showing how the internal disaffection amongst the parts of the body resembled the animosity of the plebeians against the patricians, he succeeded in winning over his audience.¹

1. Livy, *History of Rome*, trans. Canon Roberts (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1905), book 2.32.

13.8

The Rhetoric of Romans (Box 13.9)

Paul's letter to the Romans often is examined with an interest in how the apostle chooses to make his points.

- He uses testimony lists of biblical citations, in which a string of verses are quoted in rapid succession (e.g., 3:10–18 quotes Ps. 14:1–3; Ps. 53:1–2; Ps. 5:9; Ps. 140:3; Ps. 10:7; Isa. 59:7–8; Ps. 36:1).
- He employs creative techniques of biblical interpretation (e.g., arguing in 4:9–12 that, since Abraham had not been circumcised when he first trusted in God, we must conclude that uncircumcised gentiles may be put right with God through faith).
- He draws on key concepts from Stoic philosophy, including his appeal to conscience (2:15) and to “natural law” (1:26).
- He employs a rhetorical style of argument known as “diatribe,” responding to questions posed by an imaginary dialogue partner (e.g., 3:1; 6:1).
- He offers analogies from daily life to explain theological points (e.g., grafting a branch from a wild olive tree onto the root of a cultivated tree = incorporating gentiles into the people of God rooted in the history of Israel).

13.9

Recycling Romans?

Scholars have long noted two peculiarities regarding early copies of Romans: (1) the words “in Rome” are missing from 1:7 and 1:15 in some manuscripts; and (2) the entire last chapter (and sometimes the last two chapters) are missing from some manuscripts. Why? Our best guess is that the letter was recycled: copies were made and sent around to other churches with the more specific references to Rome and the Roman Christians omitted.

Indeed, a few scholars have wondered whether our copy of the letter perhaps is not the one sent to Rome. Paul greets an unusually large number of people in chapter 16. Could he have known that many people in a church that he had never visited? Or instead is it more likely that this section of the epistle is an addendum attached to a copy of the letter sent to some other church (some of the people mentioned appear to have been associated with Ephesus)? That is possible, but most scholars think that Paul knew people who had moved to Rome, and he may have made a special point to mention them all in order to establish connections with the church there.

More serious discussion attends the last three verses of the letter as it appears in English Bibles (16:25–27). Due to a host of manuscript problems, many scholars believe these verses were composed by

someone other than Paul and added to one of the truncated versions of the letter to provide a suitable closing.

13.10

Models for Understanding Justification (Box 13.6)

In Romans and in his other letters Paul seems to draw on different images to explain how the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ can justify people, or make them right with God (Rom. 3:24–26, 30; 4:24–5:1; 5:9, 16–21; cf. 1 Cor. 6:11; Gal. 2:21; 3:11–14).

- **Substitution:** All people are guilty of not living as God requires, and the penalty is (eternal) death; Jesus is completely innocent but dies on the cross to take the penalty for everyone else (see Rom. 3:23–24; 5:6–8; 6:23).
- **Redemption:** People are like slaves, owned by some hostile power (sin, death, the devil); the purchase price for freedom is the blood of Christ, and God pays this so that people can now belong to God (see Rom. 3:24; 8:23; 1 Cor. 1:30; 6:20; 7:23).
- **Reconciliation:** People have been unfaithful to God in ways that have severely damaged the divine-human relationship; Jesus comes as the mediator and offers his own life to restore the broken relationship (see Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:18–20).
- **Atonement:** People have sinned against God, who demands sacrifices of blood to nullify the consequences of sin; Jesus

dies on a cross to offer one supreme sacrifice for the sins of all (see Rom. 3:25).

- Participation: People live under the power of sin and death, and the only way out is to die and rise to new life. Through baptism, people are united with Christ, participating in his death and (ultimately) in his resurrection (see Rom. 6:1–11; Gal. 2:19–20).

See also Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 6th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 406–10.

13.11

Adoption as a Metaphor for Salvation

The apostle Paul sometimes uses the word “adoption” as a metaphor for salvation:

- “we wait for adoption” (Rom. 8:23)
- “They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption” (Rom. 9:4).
- “He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ” (Eph. 1:5).

The metaphor is developed in two passages, one from Galatians and one from Romans:

When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children.

And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.

(Gal. 4:4–7)

All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint

heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him. (Rom. 8:14–17)

Thus Paul indicates that people become adopted as heirs of God through faith (by virtue of the mediation of the Son and the Spirit), and are thus able to call God “Father” in an intimate way (“Abba” being an affectionate term Jewish children would use for addressing their fathers). The image draws meaning from the realities of belonging, connectedness, relationship, and inheritance implied by literal adoption.

As background for this metaphor, Paul may be drawing on:

- adopted relationships among humans found in the Bible (e.g., Gen. 15:1–3; Exod. 2:10; Esther 2:7, 15)
- God’s election of Israel (e.g., Hosea 11:1; Exod. 4:22)
- Greco-Roman customs regarding the manumission and subsequent adoption of slaves.

There has been some discussion concerning how literally we should take Paul’s reference to people being adopted as sons (a phrase that is consistently translated “as children” in the NRSV).

Specifically, many critics (especially feminists) have challenged the NRSV translations of these phrases:

- “so that we might receive adoption as children” (Gal. 4:5)

- “we are children of God, and if children, then heirs” (Rom. 8:16–17)

A better translation, these critics hold, would be:

- “so that we might receive adoption as sons” (Gal. 4:5)
- “we are sons of God, and if sons, then heirs” (Rom. 8:16–17)

Obviously, the NRSV translators were trying to be inclusive, emphasizing that God’s salvation is for women and men alike but, some critics say, the well-intentioned translations missed the point. Paul insists that those who are adopted by God become “heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:17). Paul assumes a cultural situation in which inheritance laws were different for men than for women: sons typically receive a better inheritance than daughters.

What Paul wants to emphasize is that, through Jesus Christ, all people may be adopted by God not merely as children but as sons, favored to receive the best possible inheritance. Jews and gentiles are adopted as sons; slaves and free persons are adopted as sons; and, indeed, men and women are both adopted as sons (and receive the same favored inheritance).

13.12

The New Perspective on Paul: A Brief Essay

Toward the end of the twentieth century, a revolution in Pauline studies brought to the fore an understanding of Paul's theology called the "new perspective."¹ This terminology assumes that there was an "old perspective" on Paul (though, of course, no one ever called it that at the time).

The discussion concerns an assessment of Paul's belief in "justification by grace" and of the importance that this had for his understanding of his own life and theology. The theme of justification by grace is prominent in two of Paul's letters (Romans, Galatians): Paul insists that people are put in a right relationship with God at God's initiative, as a result of God's mercy and love rather than because of anything that they have done to earn God's favor. The Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century produced an understanding of Paul that focused on this motif in two ways.

First, the Reformers saw justification by grace as the center of Paul's thought; all the other things that he said could be regarded as implications of this one fundamental concept. Second, the Reformers understood justification by grace to be the doctrine that separated Paul from the Judaism of his day, which taught some form of "works righteousness" (i.e., the notion that people gain a right standing with God by doing good works and being obedient to God's

commandments). Thus the “old perspective” on Paul was that he was converted from a legalistic Pharisaism that told him that he had to earn favor with God to a grace-oriented Christianity that told him that God accepted him just as he was. He was converted from a religion of guilt to a religion of love.

This understanding of Paul went virtually unchallenged for four hundred years, and then scholars began to question some of its key presuppositions. First, scholars asked whether it is proper to make justification by grace so central to Pauline thought. He does not mention it at all in several of his letters, and in the critical sections where it is discussed, his primary purpose seems to be defending the rights of gentiles as full heirs of God’s promises to Israel.² The specific question for Paul was whether gentile converts must accept the Jewish law in order to become part of God’s chosen people, and what he says about justification by grace must be understood in that context.³

Second, a number of scholars have insisted that the Pharisaism of Paul’s day was not in fact a legalistic religion of works righteousness. The Pharisees believed that they stood in a right relationship with God through grace, on account of God’s covenant with Israel. They did not believe that they had to keep the law in order to earn God’s favor; rather, they delighted in keeping the law as a way to observe the covenant that God had made with them. Furthermore, Paul never indicates that he found his pre-Christian life burdensome, nor does

he refer to his life prior to his encounter with Christ as a time when he felt the need to attain salvation through his own efforts or merit (cf. Phil. 3:6).⁴

Separate and Exclusive

The new perspective suggests that Paul's ongoing conflict with his Jewish contemporaries concerned tendencies not toward legalism but, rather, toward separatism and exclusivism. God had revealed to Paul that, through Christ, salvation was available to all humanity. Thus Paul objected to "works of the law" not because they were construed as good works that could earn God's favor but rather because they were regarded as marks of ethnic privilege. Circumcision, dietary regulations, Sabbath laws, and the like were intended to set Israel apart from other nations so that Israel might remain God's elite chosen people.

According to the new perspective on Paul, justification by grace in itself was not a new concept; the Jews had always believed that they were justified by grace through God's covenant with Israel. What was new in Paul's gospel was that justification by grace now came through faith in Jesus Christ, and this claim had radical implications for all humanity: it was no longer exclusive to Israel. The controversial point in Paul's teaching was not the basic idea of people being put right with God through grace rather than through works; the controversial point was that gentiles could now become equal partners with Jews as part of the people of God.

New Perspective on Paul: An Example

What does this verse mean?

For we hold that a person is justified by faith, apart from works prescribed by the law. (Rom. 3:28)

Traditional Interpretation

People are put right with God by trusting in what God has graciously done through Jesus Christ rather than by doing things that would earn God's favor. In this view, "works of the law" = meritorious acts of human achievement (keeping commandments, performing good works, etc.).

New Perspective

People are put right with God by trusting in what God has graciously done through Jesus Christ rather than by being faithful to the covenant that God made with Israel. In this view, "works of the law" = covenant markers that identify Jews as belonging to God's chosen nation (circumcision, Sabbath observance, dietary restrictions, etc.).

This new perspective on Paul has met with widespread acceptance and has altered the way many scholars understand various matters that come up in Paul's letters.⁵ Many interpreters think the new perspective offers a more authentic way of understanding Paul's writings, reading them in light of first-century conflicts between Jews and gentiles rather than in light of sixteenth-century conflicts between Protestants and Roman Catholics.

Some critics, however, caution that the “new perspective” has gone too far.⁶ They maintain that some Jews in the first century did indeed view obedience to the law as a means to earn God’s favor (just as some Christians in every age have thought this) and that part of Paul’s emphasis on grace is directed against such notions (Rom. 4:4–5; 10:3).⁷ More to the point, some scholars claim that the new perspective on Paul shifts the primary focus of Paul’s concern from a vertical emphasis on how people relate to God to a horizontal emphasis on how God’s people relate to one another. Critics of the new perspective grant that Paul addresses manifold questions of how Jews and gentiles should relate to one another, but they claim that these are only the implications of a fundamental concern for how all human beings (Jew or gentile) are brought into a right relationship with God. Thus, justification by grace is not just important to Paul as a means to an end, the end being reconciliation of humanity; it is, in itself, of primary importance, and the reconciliation of humanity follows as an inevitable consequence.

Discussion of these matters will continue. The debates (What is primary? What is secondary?) may seem somewhat pedantic to beginning students, but decisions on such matters do end up affecting interpretation of individual Bible passages, which in turn affect the preaching and teaching of Scripture in various Christian communities.

1. James D. G. Dunn is credited with coining the phrase “new perspective on Paul” during a 1982 lecture now published as “The New Perspective on Paul,” in *Jesus*,

Paul, and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1990), 123–33. See also James D. G. Dunn, *The New Perspective on Paul*, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2007).

2. See Krister Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976).

3. E. P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (London: SCM, 1983), 20.

4. See E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977).

5. Well-known advocates include James D. G. Dunn, E. P. Sanders, and N. T. Wright. See also Terence L. Donaldson, *Paul and the Gentiles: Remapping the Apostle's Convictional World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997); Francis Watson, *Paul, Judaism, and the Gentiles: Beyond the New Perspective*, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007).

6. For a good summary of the criticisms, see D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 375–85. See also Seyoon Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective: Second Thoughts on the Origin of Paul's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); Timo Laato, *Paul and Judaism: An Anthropological Approach*, trans. T. McElwain SFSHJ 115 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995); Thomas R. Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment: A Pauline Theology of Law* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1993); Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003); and the essays collected in D. A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien, and Mark O. Seifrid, eds., *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001–4).

7. See Mark Seifrid, *Christ, Our Righteousness: Paul's Theology of Justification*, NSBT (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000); Mark Seifrid, *Justification by Faith: The Origin and Development of a Central Pauline Theme*, NovTSup 68 (Leiden: Brill, 1992); Peter Stuhlmacher, *Revisiting Paul's Doctrine of Justification: A Challenge to the New Perspective* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

13.13

Condemnation of Homosexual Acts (Box 13.3)

In Romans 1:26–27 Paul refers to women and men who engage in what he regards as shameless sex acts with same-sex partners. He says these acts are “unnatural” and a consummation of “degrading passions.” These verses offer what is usually regarded as the most clear “generic condemnation” of homosexual activity in the Bible. Their relevance for ethical teaching on homosexual relations in our modern world has been a subject of much debate.

In Roman cities homosexuality was closely associated with promiscuous and exploitative activity, including prostitution, orgies, and sex with minors. Little was known of what is now called “sexual orientation,” and people were not generally classed as having a basic “heterosexual” or “homosexual” identity. Thus some scholars suggest that the best analogy for the behavior condemned by Paul might be “homosexual acts engaged in by heterosexual people.” Paul’s words, they say, would not necessarily apply to responsible partnerships between persons who are homosexual in terms of a basic (possibly genetic) orientation.

While support for this view seems to be increasing, many biblical scholars have not been convinced. They would say that Paul denounces the behavior not because it is promiscuous or exploitative but rather because it is “unnatural.” The point for Paul

seems to be that such actions violate God's original design for humanity. These scholars say that if Paul knew everything we know about sexual orientation, he would no doubt regard a "homosexual orientation" (even if genetically determined) as an unfortunate predisposition toward sin, as an inclination of the flesh that needs to be resisted or overcome by those who "walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (8:4).

Other biblical texts in which homosexual acts are mentioned include Genesis 19:1–9; Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Judges 19:22–25; 1 Corinthians 6:9; 1 Timothy 1:10.

13.14

Romans 3:28—The New Perspective on Paul: An Example (Box 13.8)

What does this verse mean?

For we hold that a person is justified by faith, apart from works prescribed by the law. (Rom. 3:28)

Traditional Interpretation

People are put right with God by trusting in what God has graciously done through Jesus Christ, rather than by doing things that would earn God's favor. In this view, "works prescribed by the law" = meritorious acts of human achievement (keeping commandments, performing good works, etc.).

New Perspective

People are put right with God by trusting in what God has graciously done through Jesus Christ rather than by being faithful to the covenant that God made with Israel. In this view, "works prescribed by the law" = covenant markers that identify Jews as belonging to God's chosen nation (circumcision, Sabbath observance, dietary restrictions, etc.).

13.15

Why Not Sin? (Box 13.10)

In Romans, Paul addresses issues of sin and grace. If God forgives sin, someone might ask, why would anyone want to stop sinning? If there is no limit to God's grace, why not just "sin all the more, that grace may abound" (see 6:1)?

Paul thinks that these are questions that only an unconverted person would ask. Those who have actually received God's grace and been put right with God through faith know better. The will to sin has been broken: they have died to sin (6:2) and been freed from its hold over them (6:6–7).

Paul claims that his gospel actually provides a better motivation for obedience than the law ever did: inner renewal (12:2) rather than fear of condemnation (8:1). Those who have been reconciled with God through the death of Jesus are no longer God's enemies (5:10), and they may now be expected to offer themselves in obedience to God out of spiritual worship (12:1).

Even so, Paul reminds his readers that "no condemnation" (8:1) does not mean "no accountability" (14:12). We will still stand before the judgment seat of God (14:10).

13.16

Romans 7: Who Is Wretched?

There has been considerable discussion over the years concerning Paul's seemingly self-deprecating remarks in Romans 7 (especially 7:7–24). He appears to call himself a “wretched man” (7:24), and he says, “I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. . . . I can will what is right, but I cannot do it” (7:15, 18). He even says that he is “sold into slavery under sin” (7:14), which seems to contradict what he said earlier about Christians being set free from slavery to sin (6:16–22).

Many readers take these verses as a classic expression of the dilemma faced by those who desire to be holy but struggle unsuccessfully with temptation. Paul testifies to the ultimate futility of human attempts at godliness; even the best efforts of the most morally conscientious will fail. Thus all people, including Paul, must depend on God's grace and mercy.

Other readers think that Paul is employing a rhetorical device in this section of the letter to describe what life is like apart from Christ. Paul does not speak with his own voice as a Christian in 7:7–24 but, rather, adopts the voice of one under the law who has not been made right with God by faith or endowed with the gift of the Holy Spirit. His use of the first person indicates that he can identify with

this wretched state, for it is from such that he has been delivered (7:24–25).

The debate on this question continues, and different church traditions have appealed to their interpretation of Romans 7 to support different understandings of the Christian life: Is it a life of struggle with sin or of triumph over sin?

13.17

The End of the Law (Box 13.7)

In Romans, Paul says that Christ is “the end of the law” (10:4). What does he mean?

Perhaps he means that Christ is the goal or fulfillment of the law, the one to whom the law was pointing all along and the one who accomplishes the purposes of God that the law was intended to produce. Or he might mean that the coming of Christ marks a termination of the law in God’s plan. But if that is the case, then in what sense has Christ put an end to the law? Has the law been terminated simply as a means to being made right with God, or has it also been done away with as an adequate expression of God’s will?

And what law or laws are we talking about? Is the Mosaic law as a whole to be disregarded by Christians, since God’s will can now be discerned through a transformed and renewed mind (12:2)? Or are Christians released only from keeping certain laws, ones that are pertinent to Jewish identity (such as dietary and Sabbath regulations)? Are some laws generic and timeless (13:9), and if so, how do we know which ones these are?

For a survey of how these and other questions have been answered, see Veronica Koperski, *What Are They Saying about Paul and the Law?* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2001).

13.18

Romans 13:1–7—Church and State: The Ethic of Subordination

Biblical studies on how the New Testament perceives church-state relationships” identify three distinct stances that are commended in different New Testament writings:

1. the ethic of subordination (found in the letters of Paul and in 1 Peter)
2. the ethic of resistance (found in Johannine writings and, especially, Revelation)
3. the ethic of critical distancing (found in the Synoptic Gospels)

Here we look at the ethic of subordination. For the other two views, see 1.18 and 1.20.

Summary Description of the Ethic of Subordination

The government is understood to be a gift of God, divinely established for the common good. Its God-given purpose is to encourage and maintain what is beneficial for our life together and to discourage what is harmful and disruptive. Or, put another way, the state is God’s instrument in the human community to preserve law and order and to promote justice and peace. Its power consists in its responsibility to exercise its authority toward these beneficial ends. Christians, in turn, owe to the government

their loyalty and respect. Because government is a divine gift they support its preservation of the good and opposition to evil, pray for those in authority, pay taxes, and try to live as model citizens of human communities. In so doing they act in accordance with God's intent. Conversely, to resist the state is to risk both punishment and divine disapproval.¹

Key Texts Expressive of the Ethic of Subordination

Sirach 10:4 (second-century-BCE deuterocanonical/apocryphal writing):

The government of the earth is in the hand of the Lord, and over it he will raise up the right leader for the time.

Romans 13:1–6:

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore, whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval; for it is God's servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore, one must be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience. For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, busy with this very thing. Pay to all what is due them—taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to

whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due.

Titus 3:1–2:

Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show every courtesy to everyone.

1 Peter 2:13–17:

For the Lord's sake, accept the authority of every human institution, whether of the emperor as supreme, or of governors, as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing right you should silence the ignorance of the foolish. As servants of God, live as free people, yet do not use your freedom as a pretext for evil. Honor everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

Some Common Observations regarding the Ethic of Subordination

- According to Walter Pilgrim, this position has been the dominant one for Christian history.
- The position may derive in some sense from the fourth (Calvinist fifth) commandment. Note, for example, Martin Luther's explanation of that commandment in this *Small Catechism*:

Honor your father and mother.

Question: What does this mean?

Answer: We are to fear and love God so that we do not despise or anger our parents *and others in authority*, but respect, obey, love, and esteem them.

- When Paul wrote Romans 13:1–7, he probably thought that the end of the world was near. Would it affect his position if he knew otherwise? Consider:
 1. Titus and 1 Peter are less informed by such eschatological urgency.
 2. Holders of other views also thought the end of the world was near.
 3. Should eschatological urgency be regarded as a first-century mistake or as a characteristic intrinsic to Christian theology?
- The Romans text was probably written around 55 CE, during the reign of Nero (54–68), who would later persecute Christians horribly and have Paul himself put to death by the sword. However, during the early years of Nero’s rule, conditions in Rome were favorable for Christians.
- The word translated “be subject to” in Romans 13:1 (*hypotassein*) implies some degree of mutuality or reciprocal obligation. It is elsewhere used of wives to husbands. Some have suggested “be

subordinate to” as a better translation, the key point being to recognize one’s proper position or role within the social structure.

- It is interesting that the Romans text does not use the word “obey” (*peitharchein*) with regard to governing authorities. That word is used in Titus 3:5 but not with the authorities as its obvious object. The only New Testament text using the word “obey” with explicit reference to governing authorities is Acts 5:29: “Peter and the apostles answered, ‘We must obey God rather than any human authority.’”
- Is Paul’s counsel in Romans specific to some particular situation? Some have suggested that he wanted to discourage Roman Christians from taking part in the sort of revolt against the empire undertaken by Jewish nationalists in the late 60s.
- The claim that God institutes all governing authorities appears to be in tension with views expressed elsewhere in the New Testament. For example, in Luke 4:6 the devil says to Jesus that authority over all the kingdoms of the world “has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please.”
- This counsel regarding submission to governing authorities seems to be based entirely on an assumption of good and just government, which wields the power of the sword to reward good and punish wrong. Does Paul mean to indicate that this is always the case (evident or not) or does he mean to offer counsel that would be appropriate only when that is in fact the case?

1. Walter Pilgrim, *Uneasy Neighbors: Church and State in the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 7.

13.19

Romans 6:23—The Despair of *Doctor Faustus*

The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus, commonly referred to simply as *Doctor Faustus*, is an Elizabethan tragedy by Christopher Marlowe. It premiered sometime between 1588 and 1593 and has met with tremendous popular and critical acclaim ever since. The play recounts the story of a doctor who sells his soul to the devil in order to achieve power on earth. Dr. Faustus is given ample opportunities to repent and even to renounce the bargain that guarantees his perdition but he refuses, convinced that this is the fate allotted to him. Thus Doctor Faustus adheres to a rather absolutist version of the Calvinist doctrine of predestination. Critics continue to debate whether Marlowe intended the play to be an endorsement or critique (mockery) of that doctrine.

In one pivotal scene, Faustus makes his case for why repentance is impossible: he draws on Scripture, reading aloud from Romans 6:23 and 1 John 1:18, the combination of which prove (to him) that there is no hope:

“The reward of sin is death.” That’s hard.

“If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and there’s no truth in us.” Why then, belike we must sin and so consequently die.

Ay, we must die an everlasting death.

What doctrine call you this? *Che sera, sera,*

“What will be, shall be”? Divinity, adieu!

Act 1, Scene 1, lines 41–47

Of course, any number of theologians (including Calvinists) have wanted to point out Faust’s exegetical errors. For one thing, he quotes only portions of his Bible verses. The fuller readings would be

The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 6:23)

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:8–9)

13.20

Romans 8 in Classic Literature (Box 13.11)

Two verses from Paul's letter to the Romans:

"We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now" (8:22).

"All things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose" (8:28).

From *The Return of the Native* by **Thomas Harvey** (1878):

Clym bemoans the travails of life: "I get up every morning and see the whole creation groaning and travailing in pain, as St. Paul says."

From *Wuthering Heights* by **Emily Brontë** (1847):

Joseph the servant exclaims, "Thank Hivin for all! All warks togither for gooid tuh them as is chozzen, and piked aht forr' th' rubbidge! Yah knaw what t' Scripture ses."

13.21

The Conversion of Augustine (Box 13.1)

From a hidden depth a profound self-examination had dredged up a heap of all my misery. . . . I threw myself down under a certain fig-tree and let my tears flow freely. . . . Suddenly I heard a voice from the nearby house chanting as if it might be a boy or a girl (I do not know which), saying and repeating over and over again “Pick up and read, pick up and read.” At once my countenance changed, and I began to think intently whether there might be some sort of children’s game in which such a chant is used. But I could not remember having heard of one. I checked the flood of tears and stood up. . . . I hurried back to the place where . . . I had put down the book of the apostle when I got up. I seized it, opened it, and in silence read the first passage on which my eyes lit: “Not in riots and drunken parties, not in eroticism and indecencies, not in strife and rivalry, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh in its lusts” [Rom. 13:13–14]. I neither wished nor needed to read further. At once, with the last words of this sentence, it was as if a light of relief from all anxiety flooded into my heart. All the shadows of doubt were dispelled.

Augustine, *Confessions*, 8.12.28–30, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 153.

14.0

1 Corinthians: Outline of Contents

- I. Epistolary prescript (1:1–3)
- II. Thanksgiving (1:4–9)
- III. Appeals, counsels, instruction (1:10–15:58)
 - A. Appeals for unity (1:10–4:21)
 - 1. Initial appeal (1:10–17)
 - 2. Excursus: the wisdom of the cross (1:18–2:16)
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 - 4. Conclusion of appeal (4:6–21)
 - B. Counsels about the church in the world (5:1–11:1)
 - 1. An incestuous man (5:1–13)
 - 2. Going to pagan courts (6:1–11)
 - 3. Going to prostitutes (6:12–20)
 - 4. Sex, marriage, and divorce (7:1–40)
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 - C. Counsels about life within the church (11:2–14:40)
 - 1. Introduction (11:2)
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3. Disorders at the Lord's Supper (11:17–34)

4. Spiritual gifts (12:1–14:40)

D. Instruction about the resurrection of the dead (15:1–58)

1. The tradition (15:1–11)

2. Christ, the first fruits (15:12–34)

3. The resurrection body (15:35–57)

4. Conclusion (15:58).

IV. Epistolary closing (16:1–24).

A. The collection and various itineraries (16:1–12)

B. Summary appeals, final counsels (16:13–18)

C. Greetings, autograph subscript, benediction (16:19–24)

Courtesy of *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, ed. Mark Allan Powell (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 152.

14.1

1 Corinthians in the Revised Common Lectionary

Text	Series	Liturgical Occasion	Calendar Date
1:1–9	A	Epiphany 2	Jan. 14–20
1:3–9	B	Advent 1	4 Sundays before Dec. 25
1:10–18	A	Epiphany 3	Jan. 21–27
1:18–25	B	Lent 3	4 Sundays before Easter
1:18–31	A	Epiphany 4	Jan. 28–Feb. 3
2:1–12 (13–16)	A	Epiphany 5	Feb. 4–10
3:1–9	A	Epiphany 6	Feb. 11–17
3:10–11, 16–23	A	Epiphany 7	Feb. 18–24
4:1–5	A	Epiphany 8	Feb. 25–March 1
4:1–5	A	Lectionary 8	May 24–28
6:12–20	B	Epiphany 2	Jan. 14–20
7:29–31	B	Epiphany 3	Jan. 21–27
8:1–13	B	Epiphany 4	Jan. 28–Feb. 3
9:16–23	B	Epiphany 5	Feb. 4–10
9:24–27	B	Epiphany 6	Feb. 11–17
10:1–13	C	Lent 3	4 Sundays before Easter
11:23–26	A, B, C	Maundy Thursday	1 Thursday before Easter
12:1–11	C	Epiphany 2	Jan. 14–20
12:3b–13	A	Pentecost	8 Sundays after Easter
12:12–31a	C	Epiphany 3	Jan. 21–27
13:1–13	C	Epiphany 4	Jan. 28–Feb. 3
15:1–11	C	Epiphany 5	Feb. 4–10
15:12–20	C	Epiphany 6	Feb. 11–17
15:19–26	C	Easter Day	Easter
15:35–38, 42–50	C	Epiphany 7	Feb. 18–24
15:51–58	C	Epiphany 8	Feb. 25–March 1

15:51–58	C	Lectionary 8	May 24–28
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14.2

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14.3

1 Corinthians 13—King James Version (Box 14.4)

¹Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

²And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.

³And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

⁴Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,

⁵Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; ⁶Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;

⁷Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

⁸Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.

⁹For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.

¹⁰But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

¹¹When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

¹²For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

¹³And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

14.4

Point/Counterpoint in 1 Corinthians (Box 14.1)

Paul is engaged in dialogue with the Corinthians, sometimes quoting things that they have said to him and then responding to them. His response qualifies or rejects the Corinthian viewpoint that he has just described. Here are a few examples:

	The Corinthians Say	Paul Responds
6:12	“All things are lawful.”	“Not all things are beneficial.”
6:13	“Food is meant for the stomach, and the stomach for food” (i.e., it is only natural to satisfy one’s appetites).	“God will destroy both” (i.e., God will judge people who satisfy sinful appetites).
7:1–5	“It is well for a man not to touch a woman” (i.e., even married persons should practice celibacy).	Husbands and wives should grant each other “conjugal rights,” lest there be temptation to sexual immorality.
8:1	“All of us possess knowledge.”	“Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.”

For other examples, see 8:4, 8; 9:4; 10:23. Some scholars also think that the words about women keeping silent in church in 14:34–35 describe the Corinthians’ own view rather than that of Paul (whose responses would then come in 14:36); otherwise, those comments seem to be in tension with 1 Corinthians 11:5, Paul’s attitude in Galatians 3:28, and reports in Acts 2:17–18; 21:9.

14.5

Say What? Some Puzzles in 1 Corinthians (Box 14.2)

Some matters discussed in 1 Corinthians are baffling to scholars and casual Bible readers alike.

- Paul says that women should wear head coverings in church as “a symbol of authority . . . because of the angels” (11:10). What do the angels have to do with it? Is Paul afraid that the angels might lust after the earth women (cf. Gen. 6:4)? Are these good angels or bad angels (demons)? Or are human messengers being referred to as angels? Many theories have been advanced, but no one knows for sure what this means.
- Paul refers to people “who receive baptism on behalf of the dead” (15:29). What was this ritual, and what was it meant to accomplish? Was it a vicarious baptism for people who had already died? Was Paul for it or against it? A “baptism for the dead” is practiced today among Mormons (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) but not by any other group that views 1 Corinthians as Scripture. One reason: no one knows for sure what Paul is talking about.

14.6

Apollos

Apollos (pronounced uh-pol'uh) was a Jewish Christian from Alexandria who appears in the narrative of Acts (18:24–19:1) and is also mentioned in 1 Corinthians. According to Acts, he possessed great skills in Greek rhetoric and had already learned much about Jesus when he arrived in Ephesus and began speaking at the synagogue. His abilities soon brought him to the attention of the Christians Priscilla (Prisca) and Aquila, who gave him further instruction in the Christian faith (“he knew only the baptism of John”; 18:25). Apollos then left Ephesus to go to Corinth. While in Corinth, he became acquainted with Paul. When divisions arose in the church at Corinth, Apollos was admired by some Christians as an authority equal to Peter and Paul (1 Cor. 1:11–4:6). Brief mention of Apollos is made in Titus 3:13.

14.7

Divorce in 1 Corinthians and in the Bible

Old Testament

Despite a generic disapproval of divorce, the Mosaic law did permit divorce to be initiated by the husband (though, apparently, not by the wife). The acceptable grounds for divorce are not stated (cf. Deut. 24:1, “because he finds something objectionable about her”) and may have varied over time. The practice was also regulated, such that the husband had to provide the wife with a written bill of divorce that would permit her to remarry (Deut. 24:1–2).

Certain other restrictions were in place as well: divorce was excluded as an option for a man who claimed his bride had not been a virgin when it could be proven that she had been, or for a man who had been forced to marry a woman because he raped her (Deut. 22:19, 29). There were also some legal restrictions placed on those who had been divorced: a divorced woman could not marry a priest (Lev. 21:7, 14; Ezek. 44:22), nor could she remarry a previous husband after having been married to someone else (Deut. 24:3–4).

These practices and policies sometimes provided context for prophets to speak of God’s troubled relationship with Israel (Isa. 50:1; Jer. 3:1, 8). The insistence in Malachi 2:16 that God “hates divorce” occurs in such a context (God hates for the relationship between God and a nation to be terminated) but this obviously

assumes literal application as well. Thus divorce appears to have been widely, and perhaps consistently, regarded as an unfortunate occurrence contrary to God's ideal plan for humanity.

New Testament

Jesus states the latter point above explicitly in the New Testament by distinguishing between allowance for divorce and fulfillment of God's will (Mark 10:2–12; cf. Matt. 5:31–32; 19:3–12; Luke 16:18). His view is that God's plan for humanity was revealed at creation (people were made male and female and joined together by God) and that the subsequent Torah legislation that permits and regulates divorce was given as a necessary concession due to the hardness of human hearts. Therefore, divorce and remarriage should be viewed as tantamount to adultery.

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus's words include an "exception clause": remarriage following divorce on the grounds of unchastity (in Greek, *porneia*) does not qualify as adultery (Matt. 5:32; 19:9). The meaning of this exception clause is disputed: it might refer to marital unfaithfulness on the part of the spouse (which is what the NRSV's "unchastity" suggests) or it might refer to an illicit or unlawful union (such as incestuous marriage or some other union forbidden by Torah).

1 Corinthians

The apostle Paul reiterates as teaching from the Lord that believers should not divorce and if they do they should not remarry (1 Cor. 7:10–11). He recognizes, however, that divorces might occur when only one member of a married couple becomes a Christian (1 Cor. 7:15). Even so, the believer should not seek a divorce if the unbelieving spouse consents to live with him or her (1 Cor. 7:13). Though not ideal, such a relationship allows the believing spouse to sanctify (1 Cor. 7:14) and possibly to save (1 Cor. 7:16) the unbelieving partner.

Some Special Circumstances

In some instances, the Bible recommends, or even requires, divorce. Thus Ezra required returning exiles who had married non-Israelite wives in Babylon to “send away” those wives and any children born to them (Ezra 10:1–19). Joseph intends to divorce Mary when he discovers she is pregnant even though he has not yet had sexual relations with her, and Mathew’s Gospel indicates that this is what a “righteous man” would normally do (Matt. 1:18–19). John the Baptist insists that Herod Antipas divorce his wife Herodias, who had formerly been married to his half-brother Philip (Mark 6:17–18). All of these instances seem to assume situations in which the “marriage” to be terminated is viewed as an illegitimate union. Sirach 7:26, by contrast, seems to recommend divorce from a wife whom one detests.

14.8

Spiritual Gifts in 1 Corinthians and the New Testament

The concept of spiritual gifts is present only in the New Testament, especially in the letters of Paul, although the idea of being empowered by the Holy Spirit for particular tasks is by no means alien to the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Judg. 3:10; Num. 11:29).

Various Greek terms are employed for spiritual gifts, but the most notable are *ta pneumatika*, which emphasizes the spiritual origin of the gifts (*pneuma* means “spirit”; see 1 Cor. 14:1), and *ta charismata*, which emphasizes that they are bestowed as an act of divine grace (*charis* means “grace”; see Rom. 12:6).

In distinction from “the fruit of the Spirit,” which all Christians are to manifest without variation (Gal. 5:22–23), the gifts of the Spirit are understood to vary from one believer to another (Rom. 12:6; 1 Cor. 12:4–11; cf. 1 Pet. 4:10). The undisputed letters of Paul contain four separate listings of the Spirit’s gifts (Rom. 12:6–8; 1 Cor. 12:8–10, 28, 29–30), but since no two of the lists are identical it seems clear that no list is intended to be definitive.

The various gifts may be grouped under three general headings.

Gifts of Utterance

- prophecy (Rom. 12:6; 1 Cor. 12:10, 29; cf. 1 Cor. 12:8; 14:6)

- the ability to distinguish between true and false prophecy (1 Cor. 12:10; cf. 1 Cor. 14:29; 1 Thess. 5:19–21)
- instruction (Rom. 12:7; 1 Cor. 12:28; cf. 1 Cor. 14:6)
- speaking in tongues (1 Cor. 12:10, 28; cf. 14:1–19)
- the ability to interpret speaking in tongues (1 Cor. 12:10, 30; cf. 14:5, 13)

Gifts of Practical Ministry

- caring for the needy (Rom. 12:7–8), forms of assistance (1 Cor. 12:28)
- leadership (Rom. 12:8; 1 Cor. 12:28)

Gifts of Wonder-Working Faith

- healing (1 Cor. 12:9, 28)
- performing miracles (1 Cor. 12:10, 29)

The gift of apostleship, ranked first in 1 Corinthians 12:28, is active in all three ways: in the ministry of the word (e.g., 1 Cor. 1:17; 4:17), in pastoral care (e.g., Rom. 15:25–29; Philemon), and in the working of miracles (e.g., 2 Cor. 12:12; Gal. 3:5). Additional lists of gifts found in Ephesians 4:11 and 1 Peter 4:10–11 refer only to intelligible utterance and practical ministry, not to speaking in tongues or miracle working.

Responding to disruptions caused by speaking in tongues in his Corinthian congregation, Paul emphasizes that every believer is

graced by some gift and that all gifts are bestowed by “the same Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:4–11). Nevertheless, since their purpose is to serve “the common good” (12:7), Paul concludes that prophecy (intelligible to all) is to be preferred to speaking in tongues (intelligible only to God) unless there is an interpreter (1 Cor. 14:1–5).

14.9

Speaking in Tongues in 1 Corinthians and Acts

Speaking in tongues (in Greek, *glossolalia*) refers to the act of speaking in a language that is either incomprehensible or, at least, unknown to the speaker. The phenomenon of speaking in tongues played a prominent role in the life of some early Christian communities.

Speaking in Tongues in the Book of Acts

Acts 2 contains a narrative about the events of the first Pentecost after Jesus's resurrection. On that day, the apostles gathered together and, after hearing a sound like wind and seeing tongues like fire, they "began to speak in other languages [literally, "tongues"], as the Spirit gave them ability" (Acts 2:4). The author of Acts goes on to list various nationalities of persons who heard the apostles speak, noting that everyone heard them speaking in their own native languages.

The phenomenon of speaking in tongues is mentioned twice more in Acts:

- After Peter preaches in the house of Cornelius, the gentiles there began "speaking in tongues and extolling God" (10:46). This is taken as a sign that the Holy Spirit has been poured out among gentiles and that they should be baptized.

- In Acts 19, Paul meets some disciples of Apollos at Ephesus. These disciples, who have been baptized “into John’s baptism” (19:3), say that they have never heard of the Holy Spirit. Paul instructs them, baptizes them in the name of Jesus, and lays his hands on them. Then the Holy Spirit comes upon them and they speak in tongues and prophesy (19:6).

The author of Acts probably thought of these two incidents as similar to the one described in chapter 2, although in the latter incidents there is no explicit mention of people recognizing the inspired speech as actual languages.

Speaking in Tongues in 1 Corinthians 12–14

Paul addresses the matter of “speaking in tongues” as a possible problem in the church at Corinth. He acknowledges that the ability to speak in “various kinds of tongues” and the ability to interpret these tongues are spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:10), but he also advises his readers to seek “the higher gifts” (12:31), such as the ability to prophesy (14:1). In 1 Corinthians 13 Paul exalts love as the ultimate aim for all believers, and in 1 Corinthians 14 he gives a number of specific directions about speaking in tongues:

- Speaking in tongues is helpful to the community only when it is used in conjunction with the spiritual gift of “interpretation of tongues” (14:5; cf. 12:10).

- When the community convenes, no more than three should speak in tongues, each in turn, and there must be interpretations given (14:27).

Paul thinks that uncontrolled and uninterpreted speaking in tongues does not edify the community and that it gives outsiders the impression that believers are mad (14:23). Yet he allows this activity to take place, so long as it is done in orderly fashion and is accompanied by interpretation. Paul also encourages the believers to speak in tongues in private; indeed, he claims that he does this himself more than any of them (14:15–18).

Comparison of “Tongues” in Acts and in 1 Corinthians

Interpreters generally note two differences between the phenomenon of speaking in tongues as it is portrayed in Acts and that phenomenon as it is portrayed in 1 Corinthians.

First, the persons who speak in tongues in Acts appear to be miraculously inspired to speak in actual foreign languages that they themselves have never learned. In 1 Corinthians, however, the people speak in incomprehensible languages without any expectation that anyone would recognize their words as an actual language spoken on earth. Indeed, 1 Corinthians 13:1 suggests that the Corinthians might have identified this incomprehensible speech with the language of angels. The interpretation of tongues demanded

a spiritual gift, not mere recognition on the part of one who happened to know the language being spoken.

Second, the people who speak in tongues in Acts are reported as doing so only once, on the occasion of being filled with the Holy Spirit: there is no indication that Peter, Cornelius, or anyone else who speaks in tongues on one occasion ever does so again. In 1 Corinthians, however, those who have the gift of speaking in tongues are able to exercise that gift anytime they choose.

14.10

Corinthian Bronze

One of the most highly valued metals of the Roman world was Corinthian bronze, a compound of gold and silver mixed with either copper or bronze. The metal was produced in Corinth and used throughout that city to gild the tops of columns that were carved in a distinctive floral pattern. Corinthian columns (with or without the decorative overlay) became famous throughout the empire.

The origin of Corinthian bronze is lost in legend, but all sources agree that it was invented by accident. Plutarch reports that a house containing the right proportions of gold, silver, and copper caught fire, and the three metals melted together to yield a happy surprise (*Oracles* 395.2). Petronius says that the Carthaginian general Hannibal produced the first batch when he destroyed the city of Ilium and burned its treasures (*Satyricon* 50).

Whatever the metal's origin, the Roman philosopher Seneca expresses sardonic disgust for consumers who were so driven by the metal's faddish popularity that they would pay outlandish prices to own anything made of Corinthian bronze (*On Shortness of Life* 12.2; *Helvia on Consolation* 11.3). Seneca was the brother of Gallio, the proconsul of Achaia mentioned in Acts 18:12–17. Gallio was a wealthy and powerful citizen of Corinth, and we probably can

assume that he had a different attitude toward avid consumers of his city's chief export than that expressed by his intellectual sibling.

Indebted to Paul J. Achtemeier, Joel B. Green, and Marianne Meye Thompson, *Introducing the New Testament: Its Literature and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 329.

14.11

The Body as God’s Temple

Compare the thoughts of Paul the apostle with those of Epictetus (55–135 CE), a Greek Stoic philosopher:

Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians	Epictetus, <i>Discourses</i> , VIII, “On the Nature of God” ¹
<p>Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple (3:16–17).</p> <p>Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body. (6:18–20)</p>	<p>You are a principal work, a fragment of God Himself, you have in yourself a part of Him. Why then are you ignorant of your high birth? Why do you not know whence you have come? Will you not remember, when you eat, who you are that eat, and whom you are feeding, and the same in your relations with women? When you take part in society, or training, or conversation, do you not know that it is God you are nourishing and training? You bear God about with you, poor wretch, and know it not. Do you think I speak of some external god of silver or gold? No, you bear Him about within you and are unaware that you are defiling Him with unclean thoughts and foul actions. If an image of God were present, you would not dare to do any of the things you do; yet when God Himself is present within you and sees and hears all things, you are not ashamed of thinking and acting thus: O slow to understand your nature, and estranged from God!</p>

1. Epictetus, *Discourses*, VIII, “On the Nature of God,” trans. P. E. Matheson, 1916.

Available online at <http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/dep/dep040.htm>.

14.12

On Shunning Fornication

The world of the New Testament was a patriarchal society that understood gender roles in ways that most people today would consider sexist.

The apostle Paul sometimes views women (especially prostitutes) as temptresses who might lure otherwise godly men into sin. Still, he never goes so far as to blame the women in a way that would excuse male behavior.

We may compare two texts that counsel young men to shun or flee fornication. The first was written by Paul around the middle of the first century CE. The second was written by an unknown Jewish teacher around the same time or perhaps up to a hundred years later.

1 Corinthians 6:15–20	<i>Testament of Reuben 2.13–17</i>¹
<p>Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Should I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For it is said, “The two shall be one flesh.” But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.</p>	<p>For evil are women, my children; and since they have no power or strength over man, they use wiles by outward attractions, that they may draw him to themselves. And whom they cannot bewitch by outward attractions, him they overcome by craft.</p> <p>For moreover, concerning them, the angel of the Lord told me, and taught me, that women are overcome by the spirit of fornication more than men, and in their heart they plot against men; and by means of their adornment they deceive first their minds, and by the glance of the eye instill the poison, and then through the accomplished act they take them captive.</p>

	<p>For a woman cannot force a man openly, but by a harlot's bearing she beguiles him.</p> <p>Flee, therefore, fornication, my children, and command your wives and your daughters, that they adorn not their heads and faces to deceive the mind: because every woman who uses these wiles has been reserved for eternal punishment.</p>
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1. *Testament of Rueben*, trans. Rutherford H. Platt Jr., 1926. Available online at <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bib/fbe/fbe268.htm>.

14.13

1 Corinthians 12:12–27—One Body, Many Parts

Paul uses the image of “one body with many parts” in two of his letters. In Romans he simply states the analogy: “For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another” (Rom. 12:4–5).

In 1 Corinthians he develops the image further:

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” On the contrary,

the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

(1 Cor. 12:12–27)

Notably, the Roman historian Livy (59 BCE–17 CE) reports an incident in which a spokesperson for the Senate told a fable of uncooperative body parts to persuade plebeians into accepting the leadership of the patricians.

The Senate decided, therefore, to send as their spokesperson Menenius Agrippa, an eloquent man, and acceptable to the plebs as being himself of plebeian origin. He was admitted into the camp, and it is reported that he simply told them the following fable in primitive and uncouth fashion:

“In the days when all the parts of the human body were not as now, agreeing together, but each member took its own course and spoke its own speech, the other members, indignant at seeing that everything acquired by their care and labor and

ministry went to the belly, whilst it, undisturbed in the middle of them all, did nothing but enjoy the pleasures provided for it, entered into a conspiracy; the hands were not to bring food to the mouth, the mouth was not to accept it when offered, the teeth were not to masticate it. Whilst, in their resentment, they were anxious to coerce the belly by starving it, the members themselves wasted away, and the whole body was reduced to the last stage of exhaustion. Then it became evident that the belly rendered no idle service, and the nourishment it received was no greater than that which it bestowed by returning to all parts of the body this blood by which we live and are strong, equally distributed into the veins, after being matured by the digestion of the food.”

By using this comparison, and showing how the internal disaffection amongst the parts of the body resembled the animosity of the plebeians against the patricians, he succeeded in winning over his audience.¹

1. Livy, *History of Rome*, trans. Canon Roberts (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1905), book 2.32.

14.14

A Practical Question about Resurrection

In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul discusses the coming resurrection of the dead. He anticipates that someone might ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?” (v. 35).

His answer:

What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. Not all flesh is alike, but there is one flesh for human beings, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. There are both heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one thing, and that of the earthly is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; indeed, star differs from star in glory.

So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. (1 Cor. 15:36–44)

A similar answer to a practical resurrection question can be found in the Talmud, a collection of sacred Jewish writings. This time the

question does not concern what kind of body the risen person will have, but whether that body will be clothed.

Queen Cleopatra questioned R. Mair thus: I am aware that the dead will be restored. As it reads [Ps. lxxii. 16]: “And (men) shall blossom out of the city like herbs of the earth.” My question, however, is: When they shall be restored, will they be naked or dressed? And he answered: This may be drawn by an a fortiori conclusion from wheat. A grain of wheat which is buried naked comes out dressed in so many garments: the upright, who are buried in their dress, so much the more shall they come out dressed in many garments.¹

1. “Tract Sanhedrin” in *The Babylonian Talmud*, Book 8, Section Jurisprudence (Damages), trans. Michael Rodkinson (Boston, Talmud Society, 1918), chap. 11.

14.15

1 Corinthians 7:1–5—A Path to Marital Celibacy

Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: “It is well for a man not to touch a woman.” But because of cases of sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another except perhaps by agreement for a set time, to devote yourselves to prayer, and then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. (1 Cor. 7:1–5)

Typical Modern Interpretation

Most modern scholars understand the citation in the first verse (“It is well for a man not to touch a woman”) as something that the Corinthians have said to Paul. He is now responding to their claim and he issues a strong qualification that serves almost as a rebuttal.

In short, some Corinthians thought that all men (including married ones) should practice sexual abstinence. Paul thought such a practice would make them easy targets for temptation; therefore, men and women should not deprive one another of sexual gratification. Almost parenthetically, the apostle does allow that a couple might perhaps decide to forego sexual relations for “a set

time” to devote themselves to prayer—basically “fasting” from sex in a manner analogous to fasting from food.

Jerome (347–420)—First Epistle to Pammachius

The theologian responsible for translating the Latin Vulgate understood this passage differently. He took the initial sentence at face value, that is, as a statement of what Paul believed. Everything that followed was then understood as a concession by Paul, given the weakness of human flesh. And the “exception” in verse 5 should be understood as a strategy for reaching the goal expressed at the start. The ideal married couple is as chaste as virgins, with a relationship analogous to brother and sister, Jerome believed.

Thus Jerome (and thousands of priests in the centuries that followed) counseled married couples to make “abstinence from all sexual relations” their goal. The husband needs to be in charge, but he is urged to persuade his wife “by degrees” that she should covenant with him in achieving this goal. In so doing, the couple will be able to devote themselves more ardently to prayer and (drawing now on 1 Pet. 3:7) they will find that their prayers become more effective.

Going further, if sexual abstinence is what makes prayer effective, we may also reason that truly effectual prayer is impossible while cohabitation continues. And then it also might follow that the married couple that cohabitates should not participate in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper.

Here are excerpts from Jerome's *First Epistle to Pammachius* (also known as *Epistle* or *Letter 48*):

To speak yet more plainly—if you are the “slave” of a wife, do not allow this to cause you sorrow, do not sigh over the loss of your virginity. Even if you can find pretexts for parting from her to enjoy the freedom of chastity, do not seek your own welfare at the price of another’s ruin. Keep your wife for a little, and do not try too hastily to overcome her reluctance. Wait till she follows your example. If you only have patience, your wife will some day become your sister. (48.6)¹

At the end, also, of our comparison of virgins and married women we have summed up the discussion thus: “When one thing is good and another thing is better; when that which is good has a different reward from that which is better; and when there are more rewards than one, then, obviously, there exists a diversity of gifts. The difference between marriage and virginity is as great as that between not doing evil and doing good—or, to speak more favorably still, as that between what is good and what is still better.” (48.7)²

When I do my duty as a husband, I cannot fulfil the requirements of continence. The same apostle, in another place, commands us to pray always (1 Thess. 5:17). But if we are always to pray, we must never yield to the claims of wedlock for, as often as I render what is due to my wife, I incapacitate myself for prayer. When I speak thus it is clear that I rely on the words of the apostle: “Do not deprive one another, except it be with consent

for a time, that you may give yourselves to . . . prayer” (1 Cor. 7:5) Here, the Apostle Paul tells us that when we have intercourse with our wives we cannot pray. If, then, sexual intercourse prevents what is less important— that is, prayer— how much more does it prevent what is more important— that is, the reception of the body of Christ? Peter, too, exhorts us to continence, that our “prayers be not hindered” (1 Pet. 3:7).

(48.15)³

1. P. Schaaf et al., eds., *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 2nd series, 14 vols. (New York: Christian Literature, 1887–94), 6:48.
2. Schaaf et al., eds., *A Select Library*, 6:48.
3. Schaaf et al., eds., *A Select Library*, 6:48.

14.16

1 Corinthians 13:13—“Theological Virtues” and the Names of Saints

In 1 Corinthians 13:13, the apostle Paul writes, “And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.” The same triad of virtues is mentioned near the beginning and the end of 1 Thessalonians:

We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. (1:2–3)

But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. (5:8)

See also Galatians 5:5–6; Colossians 1:4–5; Hebrews 10:22–24.

The KJV used the word “charity” in place of “love” in these passages.

In Elizabethan English, “charity” did not have the sense it has acquired in our modern day, but simply meant “unselfish love.”

Theological Virtues

Faith, hope, and charity were identified early in church history as “the theological virtues,” because unlike the classical virtues (prudence,

temperance, fortitude, and justice) they were said to have God as their formal object.

The virtues are supremely practiced when one has faith *in God*, hope *in God*, and love *for God*. As such, they constitute spiritual perfection, with ensuing moral implication.

So Augustine (345–430) writes, “Thus a man supported by faith, hope, and charity, with an unshaken hold upon them, does not need the Scriptures except for the instruction of others” (*Enchiridion de fide, spe, et caritate* 3–4).

Names of Saints

During the reign of Hadrian (117–138 CE), a Roman matron named Sophia (Greek for “wisdom”) had three daughters named Pistis (“Faith”), Elpis (“Hope”), and Agape (“Charity”). She and her daughters were martyred and the daughters were canonized as Saint Faith, Saint Hope, and Saint Charity. For six hundred years, pilgrims visited their tomb in the crypt of St. Pancratius Church on the Aurelian Way.

At a later time (the date is uncertain), another woman named Sapientia (Latin for “wisdom”) is said to have been martyred along with three companions who were named Spes, Fides, and Caritas (Latin for “Hope,” “Faith,” and “Charity”). They were buried near the tomb of Saint Cecilia in the cemetery of Saint Callistus on the Appian

Way. While they were not canonized as saints, their tomb did become a pilgrimage site.

Skeptics have thought it unlikely that two groups of martyred women would have borne the same names—much less, names so fraught with biblical meaning. But some scholars point out that these were common names for Christian women in the early centuries, making the coincidence a tad less incredible.

14.17

Correspondence with the Corinthians (Box 15.1)

Paul made at least two visits to the church at Corinth and wrote at least four letters to the Corinthians.

First visit: Paul founds the church (Acts 18:1–18; 2 Cor. 1:19)

Letter 1 (referred to in 1 Cor. 5:9)

Could it be found in 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1 (see EXPLORE 15.6)?

- Paul receives distressing reports of problems in Corinth:
 1. an oral report from Chloe's people (1 Cor. 1:11)
 2. a written letter from the church (1 Cor. 7:1)

Letter 2 (1 Corinthians)

Second visit: a painful confrontation (2 Cor. 2:5; 7:12; 13:2)

Letter 3 (referred to in 2 Cor. 2:3–4; 7:12)

Could it be found in 2 Corinthians 10–13 (see EXPLORE 15.6)?

- Paul receives Titus's report of goodwill in Corinth (2 Cor. 7:6–7).

Letter 4 (2 Corinthians, or at least 2 Cor. 1:1–6:13; 7:2–16)

- Was there a Letter 5 (on super-apostles)? Could it be found in 2 Corinthians 10–13?
- Was there a Letter 6 (on fundraising)? Could it be found in 2 Corinthians 8–9 (or just 2 Cor. 8)?

- Was there a Letter 7 (also on fundraising)? Could it be found in 2 Corinthians 9 (separate from 2 Cor. 8)?

14.18

1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19–20—Temple of God

Imagery

In his first letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul twice refers to Christians as the “temple of God”:

Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? (1 Cor. 3:16)

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God . . . therefore glorify God in your body. (1 Cor. 6:19–20)

In the first of these passages, Paul applies the metaphor “temple of God” to the church as a whole, while in the second he appears to apply it to individual Christians.

A Communal Image

The main problem that Paul is addressing in the first part of his letter is that of divisions within the church—some people seek to follow one earthly leader, while others follow another one. So when Paul tells the Corinthians that “God’s Spirit dwells in you,” he means to emphasize that the entire congregation serves as the dwelling place of God. Those who act divisively are attacking God’s temple, because what one does to the church, one does to God’s Spirit-filled dwelling place.

An Individual Image

In 1 Corinthians 6, Paul takes the point a step further with regard to personal morality (specifically, sexual morality). The problem under discussion is prostitution: apparently, some members of the Corinthian church see nothing wrong with going to prostitutes. Paul tells them that abuse of one's physical body also constitutes an attack on God's temple, because every individual member of the church is a part of the dwelling place that God's Spirit has filled.

Personal Reflection

My experience of growing up as a Christian in America is that I have heard a lot of emphasis placed on the second, subsidiary point and very little emphasis placed on the main point from which it was derived. I have heard many sermons about personal morality that have sought to remind me that my body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. God dwells in each and every one of us and therefore what we do to our physical bodies we do to God's temple. We should not smoke cigarettes or overeat or abuse drugs or engage in sexual immorality.

My guess is that Paul would agree with these sermons, but he would preach them only as the implications of a basic and primary point. He says to the Corinthians, your *congregation* is the temple of the Holy Spirit. God dwells in the body of assembled worshipers. What

you do to *that body*—the corporate body of believers—you do to God’s temple (see also 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21–22).

I do not believe I have ever heard a sermon that uses the “temple of God” image in the primary sense that Paul uses the phrase. I have discovered that whenever a preacher says, “Your body is the temple of God,” I am going to hear a sermon about taking care of my personal, physical body—not a sermon about caring for the body of the church as a whole. In my experience, at least, the minor point tends to be stressed and the major point tends to be ignored.

If we were to explore this further we might observe a similar tendency with regard to many other passages of Scripture. Paul tells the Corinthians, “you are a letter of Christ . . . written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God” (2 Cor. 3:3). I have heard sermons on this passage extolling Christians to be witnesses for Jesus in word and deed: “You may be the only Bible some people ever read—your speech and behavior must bring words of Christ to them.” Yes, but Paul is actually saying that the congregation at Corinth—the entire church—is a letter from Christ, bearing public witness to the world through its conduct *as a community*.

Or, again, many individual Christians may treasure the promise of Scripture in Philippians 1:6: “the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” Individual Christians will say, “I know that God is not finished with me yet, and I trust that God will keep working on me until at last I am done.” True,

but the “you” in Philippians 1:6 actually refers to the congregation at Philippi: God began a good work in this church and “will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”

What the Bible teaches about churches, about communities, about congregations, no doubt applies (in a secondary sense) to individual Christians. Still, American Christians (at least) are prone to grasp at this secondary meaning and overlook the main point from which it is derived.

From Mark Allan Powell, *Loving Jesus* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004), 42–44.

14.19

Shakespeare and 1 Corinthians

The plays of William Shakespeare are filled with allusions and near-quotations of the Bible. The Bard appears to have been especially fond of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians.

Direct Quotes

First there are direct quotations (or at least attempts at direct quotation).

A Midsummer Night's Dream: Bottom says, "The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report, what my dream was" (4.1.203–209).

Paul writes, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him—these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit" (1 Cor. 2:9–10).

Bottom (a character who often plays "the fool") is apparently trying to quote Paul, albeit in a garbled, nonsensical way. Paul himself was quoting from, or at least alluding to, Isaiah 64:4.

A Winter's Tale: Paulina (female Paul?) restores the supposedly dead Hermione to life, observing that "in every wink of an eye, some new grace will be born" (5.2.112–13).

Paul writes, “We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye” (1 Cor. 15:51–52).

As You Like It: Touchstone says, “I do now remember a saying. ‘The fool doth think he is wise, but the wise man knows himself to be a fool’” (5.1.34–35).

Paul writes, “If you think that you are wise in this age, you should become fools so that you may become wise” (1 Cor. 3:18).

Marital Ethic

Second, there are instances in which the romantic or sexual foibles of Shakespeare’s characters are played out against that marital ethic of 1 Corinthians 7. Shakespeare scholars suggest the Pauline teaching of 1 Corinthians 7 formed part of the “cultural repertoire” of Elizabethan audiences, such that biblical passages would have immediately come to mind when characters said or did certain things.

The Merchant of Venice: When Shylock’s Jewish daughter decides to marry her Christian lover she proclaims, “I shall end this strife, become a Christian and thy loving wife.”

Paul writes, “The unbelieving wife is made holy through her husband” (1 Cor. 7:14).

Henry IV, Part 1: Hotspur’s wife, Lady Percy (aka Kate), openly wonders why her husband no longer comes to her at night: “For what

offence have I this fortnight been / A banish'd woman from my
Harry's bed?" (2.3.896)

Paul writes, "The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights,
and likewise the wife to her husband." (1 Cor. 7:3).

14.20

What's in a Name? "Corinthian" Characters in Modern Fiction

The word "Corinthian" has never been a proper name—until the twentieth century. For some reason (or perhaps for various reasons) a number of characters in modern fiction have born this name.

***Song of Solomon* by Toni Morrison:** Morrison's critically acclaimed novel features a prominent female character named First Corinthians Dead. The family with the surname Dead has a tradition of choosing names for children at random from the Bible. First Corinthians goes by "Corrie" and has female family members named Magdalene Dead and Pilate Dead. Critics have noted that although the name is supposedly random, First Corinthians attempts to unify people who are divided, just as Paul does with the Corinthian congregation in the first of his letters to that church.

***The Corinthian* by Georgette Heyer:** This 1940 novel may not have pleased critics to the extent of Morrison's work but it is justifiably famous as the book that gave birth to a new genre of literature: the romance novel. Indeed, it was the first in a series of what were called the Regency Romance novels, to be emulated eventually by Harlequin Romances and others.

The main character of the book is introduced to the reader with a phrase that gives the work its title: "He was a very notable

Corinthian.” But what does that mean? Most reviewers think the description is meant to imply “a man about town, a socialite, a man who loves luxury”—all of which would fit the character and comply with some dictionary definitions of connotations the word “Corinthian” can have.

But something else could also be implied (depending on how well Heyer knew the New Testament). The character is also a man who wants to avoid marriage at all costs. Thus he could be regarded as a character who has absorbed Paul’s counsel in 1 Corinthians: “To the unmarried and the widows, I say that it is well for them to remain unmarried as I am . . . those who marry will experience distress in this life, and I would spare you that” (7:8, 28).

Sandman by Neil Gaiman: The classic series of graphic novels by Neil Gaiman garnered awards and set new standards for its medium in the 1990s. One of the most chilling characters in those volumes was a horrific serial killer name The Corinthian. Born of nightmares, he had two extra mouths where eyes would normally be (he covered these with sunglasses) and was known for devouring the eyes of his victims, a ritual that gave him clairvoyant powers.

But why was he named “The Corinthian”? Fan blogs were replete with theories and Gaiman seemingly teased his readers in one late installment (*The Kindly Ones*) by having a character remark that he did not care whether The Corinthian had derived his name from “the letters, the pillars, the leather, the place, or the mode of behavior.”

Thus there seem to be five options:

1. “The letters” is a reference to 1 and 2 Corinthians in the New Testament.
2. “The pillars” is a reference to Corinthian columns, a prominent style of Roman architecture.
3. “The leather” refers to Corinthians leather, a modern type of upholstery used in automobiles
4. “The place” could refer to the ancient or modern city of Corinth, Greece.
5. “The mode of behavior” could mean indulging in luxury and/or licentiousness.

Debate continues, though the first option seems most likely to many. One self-described “New Testament scholar/comic book nerd” has pointed out that the immortal character who creates *The Corinthian* refers to him as “a dark mirror,” a likely reference to 1 Corinthians 13:12. Still, most think there must be more to it than that, and the quest continues. Budding New Testament scholars/comic book nerds should feel free to join in.

14.21

Better to Marry Than to Burn (Box 14.3)

In 1 Corinthians 7:9 Paul counsels young people to marry if they are not able to practice self-control. It is “better to marry than to burn” (KJV; or, in the NRSV translation, “to be aflame with passion”).

Chaucer uses the line to somewhat humorous effect in his famous *Canterbury Tales* (3.49–52). The sassy and oft-widowed Wife of Bath justifies her need for a sixth marriage:

“. . . th’ apostle seith that I am free
To wedde, a Goddes half, where it liketh me.
He seith that to be wedded is no synne;
Bet is to be wedded than to brynne.”

14.22

1 Corinthians 13 in *St. Paul's Letter to American Churches*

On November 4, 1956, Martin Luther King Jr. delivered a sermon, titled *St. Paul's Letter to American Churches*, at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. In this creative message, he presented an imaginary epistle of the apostle Paul. In the sermon, King listed numerous things of which Americans may justifiably be proud, but pointed to problems of racial discrimination as evidence that the country was lacking in love, which Paul had told the Corinthians mattered more than all other marks of success.

The concluding paragraphs of the sermon draw on 1 John 4:7–8 and, especially, 1 Corinthians 13:

I must say to you, as I said to the church at Corinth, that I still believe that love is the most durable power in the world. . . .

This principle stands at the center of the cosmos. As John says, "God is love." He who loves is a participant in the being of God. He who hates does not know God.

So American Christians,

You may master the intricacies of the English language.

You may possess all of the eloquence of articulate speech.

But even if you “speak with the tongues of man and angels, and have not love, you are become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.” . . .

You must come to see that it is possible for a man to be self-centered in his self-denial and self-righteous in his self-sacrifice. He may be generous in order to feed his ego and pious in order to feed his pride. Man has the tragic capacity to relegate a heightening virtue to a tragic vice. Without love benevolence becomes egotism, and martyrdom becomes spiritual pride.

So the greatest of all virtues is love. It is here that we find the true meaning of the Christian faith.

This is at bottom the meaning of the cross. The great event on Calvary signifies more than a meaningless drama that took place on the stage of history. It is a telescope through which we look out into the long vista of eternity and see the love of God breaking forth into time.

It is an eternal reminder to a power drunk generation that love is most durable power in the world, and that it is at bottom the heartbeat of the moral cosmos.

Only through achieving this love can you expect to matriculate into the university of eternal life.

14.23

1 Corinthians 13:12—Through a Glass Darkly

In 1 Corinthians 13:12, Paul muses on our relative ignorance of the spiritual realm compared to what will become clear in the future: “For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.”

The 1611 King James Version renders the first phrase of this verse, “For now we see through a glass, darkly,” and that translation would be picked up in numerous literary allusions. To “see through a glass darkly” means to be ignorant of things that are simply beyond knowing—no amount of education or experience will remedy the situation.

Ingmar Bergman (1918–2007): The phrase was used as the title of a 1961 Swedish film by Ingmar Bergman. *Through a Glass Darkly* presents the stories of family members who essentially serve as mirrors for one another: the dominant theme is failure of human communication. Like Paul, Bergman believed that people know themselves and others only in part and, so, relationships must be based on something that transcends the inadequacies of knowledge.

Philip D. Dick (1928–82): The phrase “Through a glass, darkly” also inspired the title of a 1977 science-fiction novel by Philip K. Dick, *A Scanner Darkly*, on which a 2006 film of the same name was based.

The novel portrays a dystopian future in which narcotics agents use surveillance equipment (scanners) to combat the spread of a new, lethal drug. Again, judgments based on “partial knowledge” become a dominant theme.

Lewis Carroll (1832–98): Some have speculated that the English novelist Lewis Carroll might have had 1 Corinthians 13:12 in mind when he crafted *Through the Looking Glass*, an 1871 sequel to *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. In this volume, Alice passes through a mirror to discover an alternative reality that exists on the other side. She realizes that those on either side of the glass know only “in part,” unaware of the alternative reality that they have never experienced.

14.24

1 Corinthians 13:13—Faith, Hope, Charity

In 1 Corinthians 13:13, the apostle Paul writes, “And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.” These three virtues—faith, hope, and love (“charity” in the KJV)—are also mentioned near the beginning and the end of 1 Thessalonians:

We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. (1:2–3)

But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.” (5:8)

See also Galatians 5:5–6; Colossians 1:4–5; Hebrews 10:22–24.

What could anybody have against these three things?

A. M. Klein (1909–72) was a Canadian lawyer, poet, and novelist best known for works that reflected the cultural heritage of Jewish people and that drew inspiration from a wealth of Jewish legend, tradition, and folklore. However, in one poem, “Of Faith, Hope, and Charity,” he lashes out at what he took to be attributes of unhealthy or least unsavory piety: faith, hope, and charity.

14.25

1 Corinthians 15:51–52—The Last Trump

One passage from Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians bequeathed the memorable image of a trumpet blast that will signal the end of time:

Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. (1 Cor. 15:51–52)

In the KJV, the passage is rendered thus:

Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,

In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, **at the last trump:** for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

The highlighted phrase “at the last trump” would prove sufficiently memorable to recur often in English literature. Sometimes it is used in contexts that imply a divine consummation of the ages. At other times it is used in a more general or secular sense to mean “when all is said and done.” Other biblical references to end-of-time trumpet blasts may be found in Matthew 24:31 and 1 Thessalonians 4:16.

H. G. Wells, the twentieth-century pioneer of science-fiction writing, produced not just one but two short stories featuring “last trump” imagery. Wells was an atheist who delighted in weaving sacrilegious images or themes into his works, openly mocking what he regarded as ridiculous doctrines of Christianity.

“A Vision of Judgment” (1899): This story begins with “the last trump.” The angel Gabriel blows his horn and God proceeds to judge all people, in alphabetical order. But God and Gabriel take delight in laughing at sinners and saints alike. There are no consequences for anything that they have done and every human is mocked for thinking that there would be: the very concept of good and evil turns out to have been ridiculous.

Embarrassed, the human race flees “up the sleeve of God” and, after every human soul has taken shelter there, God shakes them all out of his sleeve and on to a new planet where they are told they will all be given a second chance. “Now that you understand me and each other a little better,” God says, “try again.”

“The Story of the Last Trump” (1915): In this story (actually the concluding chapter to a hodgepodge novel called *Boon*), a clumsy child in heaven tries to play with Gabriel’s trumpet, drops it, and it falls to earth, unbeknownst to the angels. Later, when the Judgment Day is supposed to arrive (around 1000), it must be postponed because the trumpet cannot be found.

Meanwhile, on earth the trumpet has ended up in a curio shop whose owner eventually hooks it up to an air compressor; it gives a brief blast and then vanishes (snatched back to heaven by a now-cognizant angel). The story relates what happened in the brief moment of that blast:

All about the world a sound was heard like the sound of a trumpet instantly cut short . . . in an instant, and for only an instant, the dead lived, and all that were alive in the world did for a moment see the Lord God and all His powers, His hosts of angels, and all His array looking down upon them. They saw Him as one sees by a flash of lightning in the darkness, and then instantly the world was opaque again, limited, petty, habitual.¹

And what would be the lasting consequence of that momentary revelation? Nothing. Though all humanity had experienced the same vision simultaneously, everyone soon forgot the vision and each person returned to his or her own petty, habitual existence. Because

if a thing is sufficiently strange and great no one will perceive it. Men will go on in their own ways though one rose from the dead to tell them that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand, though the Kingdom itself and all its glory became visible, blinding their eyes. They and their ways are one.²

1. H. G. Wells, "The Story of the Last Trump," in *Boon* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, Ltd., 1915). Available online at <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/34962/34962-h/34962-h.htm#tenth>.

2. Wells, "The Story of the Last Trump."

14.26

1 Corinthians 16:22—Not a Curse (or a Drug)

In 1 Corinthians 16:22, Paul writes, “Let anyone be accursed who has no love for the Lord. Marana ‘tha!”

The phrase “Marana ‘tha” is an Aramaic expression meaning “Come, Lord!” Paul’s Greek readers in Corinth did not know any more Aramaic than modern Americans and so Paul very deliberately used an expression that they would not understand unless someone explained it to them. Most likely he had already told them what it meant and the phrase may have become part of that liturgy: it had an exotic sound to it and helped to solidify their community identity.

Paul’s intention is ignored or spoiled by the NIV, NRSV, and other modern English Bibles that substitute an English phrase rather than using a phrase that would require explanation or communal knowledge.

In any case, the word has had an interesting history of misinterpretation in English-speaking Christianity.

King James Version

The translators of the 1611 King James Version of the Bible did not know what the word meant but since it is preceded in Paul’s letter by the word *anathema*, which means “accursed,” they guessed that it should be paired with that word to mean “a double curse.” They

translated the verse thus: “If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha.” And centuries of Bible readers were told that *Anathema Maranatha* means “cursed” or “really cursed” (since *anathema* by itself would mean “cursed”).

As a result the phrase turns up in numerous works of English literature.

- A famous essay by Thomas Macaulay laments how “principles of liberty became the Anathema Maranatha of every fawning dean” (“Essay on Milton,” 1895).
- A well-known poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow says, “Anathema maranatha! was the cry That rang from town to town, from street to street” (“Jewish Cemetery at Newport,” 1854).
- So too in works by Harriet Beecher Stowe and other English writers.¹

Anyone who understands “Maranatha” to mean, “Come, Lord” may be at a loss to explain such odd uses of the word in English literature. But the explanation is actually simple: following the KJV, the writers thought the word *maranatha* was one half of a curse.

Hippie Christians in the 1970s

The early 1970s saw a religious revival of evangelical piety among “hippie Christians” in the United States and other parts of the world. The revival was dubbed “the Jesus movement” by the press and its

participants were often called “Jesus freaks” (a term that, for the most part, they did not find offensive).

These Jesus freaks latched on to the word “maranatha” as a slogan, in part because the revival was imbued with a heavy dose of “rapture theology” and many Jesus freaks were expecting the Lord to come soon. Indeed, a music company initially devoted to recordings made by and for participants in the Jesus movement revival took the name Maranatha! Music.

The problem of misinterpretation arose again. Outside the Jesus movement, not many Christians (to say nothing of non-Christians) knew what the word “maranatha” meant and many seemed to associate it with “marijuana” or, for some other reason, were convinced it had something to do with drugs.

Hippie pietists who owned T-shirts, Bible covers, posters, and other paraphernalia with “Maranatha!” blazoned in bright colors were often disparaged as aficionados of something related to the drug culture. Jesus freaks with a sense of humor seized upon this frequent misunderstanding to display slogans like, “Maranatha! God’s Way to Get High” (an ironic reference to the impending rapture).

1. David Lyle Jeffrey, ed., *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 480–81.

15.0

2 Corinthians: Outline of Contents

- I. Epistolary prescript (1:1–2)
- II. Blessing (1:3–11)
- III. Assurances, instruction, warnings (1:12–13:10)
 - A. Assurances of concern (1:12–2:13)
 - 1. Introduction (1:12–14)
 - 2. A canceled visit (1:15–2:2)
 - 3. A tearful letter (2:3–11)
 - 4. A trip to Macedonia (2:12–13)
 - B. Comments on apostolic service (2:14–5:19)
 - 1. Introduction (2:14–3:6)
 - 2. The ministry of the new covenant (3:7–4:6)
 - 3. The ministry and mortality (4:7–5:10)
 - 4. The ministry of reconciliation (5:11–19)
 - C. Various appeals and warnings (5:20–9:15)
 - 1. About reconciliation with God (5:20–6:10)
 - 2. About reconciliation with the Pauline apostolate (6:11–7:3)
 - 3. About the collection for Jerusalem (7:4–9:15)

D. Warnings about false apostles (10:1–13:10)

1. A call for obedience and understanding (10:1–18)

2. “A fool’s speech” (11:1–12:13)

3. Warnings in advance of a visit (12:14–13:10)

IV. Epistolary closing (13:11–13)

A. Summary appeals (13:11)

B. Greetings (13:12)

C. Benediction (13:13)

Courtesy of *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, ed. Mark Allan Powell (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 155.

15.1

2 Corinthians in the Revised Common Lectionary

Text	Series	Liturgical Occasion	Calendar Date
1:18–22	B	Epiphany 7	Feb. 18–24
3:1–6	B	Epiphany 8	Feb. 25–March 1
3:1–6	B	Lectionary 8	May 24–28
3:12–4:2	C	Transfiguration	7 Sundays before Easter
4:3–6	B	Transfiguration	7 Sundays before Easter
4:5–12	B	Lectionary 9	May 29–June 4
4:13–5:1	B	Lectionary 10	June 5–11
5:6–10 (11–13), 14–17	B	Lectionary 11	June 12–18
5:16–21	C	Lent 4	3 Sundays before Easter
5:20b–6:10	A, B, C	Ash Wednesday	7 Wednesdays before Easter
6:1–13	B	Lectionary 12	June 19–25
8:7–15	B	Lectionary 13	June 26–July 2
12:2–10	B	Lectionary 14	July 3–9
13:11–13	A	Holy Trinity	9 Sundays after Easter

15.2

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15.3

Collection for Jerusalem

The “collection for Jerusalem” or “collection for the saints” was an offering gathered by Paul from primarily gentile Christians for Jewish Christians in Jerusalem.

In 1 Corinthians 16:1–2, Paul gives instructions to the Corinthian Christians about this fund. His churches in Galatia (1 Cor. 16:1) and Macedonia (2 Cor. 8:1–5; 9:1–2) had also been urged to make contributions, and the latter, at least, seem to have responded generously (2 Cor. 8:3–5). The Corinthians, while quick to pledge their support, may have been slow to follow through with any gifts (2 Cor. 8:6; 9:1–5). There are hints that opponents of Paul may have caused the Corinthian Christians to suspect Paul’s motives in soliciting their money (2 Cor. 12:14–18).

At least two factors account for the high priority Paul seems to have placed on this project over a several-year period. First, he considered it a needed act of charity (Rom. 15:26; 2 Cor. 8:4), perhaps an extension of the relief fund he and Barnabas had delivered to the Jerusalem church on behalf of the Christians in Antioch (Acts 11:27–30). Second, he had committed himself to it as a part of the agreement reached when the Jewish-Christian leaders in Jerusalem approved his mission to the gentiles (Gal. 2:1–10);

therefore, it symbolized the partnership of Jews and gentiles in the gospel.

Little information is available concerning the actual completion and delivery of the collection. For what can be known, see Romans 15:25–31 (cf. Acts 20:24; 24:17; 1 Cor. 16:3–4).

15.4

Plutarch on Self-Commendation (Box 15.4)

But those who are forced to speak in their own praise are made more enduring by another procedure as well: not to lay claim to everything, but to unburden themselves, as it were, of honor, letting part of it rest with chance and part with God.

Plutarch, *Moralia*, vol. 7, trans. Philip H. De Lacy and Benedict Einarson, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959), §542E (On Praising Oneself Inoffensively 11).

15.5

Correspondence with the Corinthians (Box 15.1)

Paul made at least two visits to the church at Corinth and wrote at least four letters to the Corinthians.

First visit: Paul founds the church (Acts 18:1–18; 2 Cor. 1:19)

Letter 1 (referred to in 1 Cor. 5:9)

Could it be found in 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1 (see EXPLORE 15.6)?

- Paul receives distressing reports of problems in Corinth:
 - an oral report from Chloe’s people (1 Cor. 1:11)
 - a written letter from the church (1 Cor. 7:1)

Letter 2 (1 Corinthians)

Second visit: a painful confrontation (2 Cor. 2:5; 7:12; 13:2)

Letter 3 (referred to in 2 Cor. 2:3–4; 7:12)

Could it be found in 2 Corinthians 10–13 (see EXPLORE 15.6)?

- Paul receives Titus’s report of goodwill in Corinth (2 Cor. 7:6–7).

Letter 4 (2 Corinthians, or at least 2 Cor. 1:1–6:13; 7:2–16)

- Was there a Letter 5 (on super-apostles)?
 - Could it be found in 2 Corinthians 10–13?
- Was there a Letter 6 (on fundraising)?
 - Could it be found in 2 Corinthians 8–9 (or just 2 Cor. 8)?

- Was there a Letter 7 (also on fundraising)?
 - Could it be found in 2 Corinthians 9 (separate from 2 Cor. 8)?

15.6

The Lost Letters: Have They Been Found? (Box 15.2)

Paul wrote at least four letters to the Corinthians, but we have only two in our Bibles. Many Christians have longed to discover copies of the missing letters, the ones identified as Letter 1 and Letter 3 in EXPLORE 15.5.

Today, many scholars believe that those letters have been found, and that they were right under our noses all along. A prominent theory holds that the letter known as 2 Corinthians is actually a patchwork epistle containing not only the work identified as Letter 4 in EXPLORE 15.5 but also other letters:

- Second Corinthians 6:14–7:1 may be an excerpt from Letter 1. In its present context, this passage forms an odd interruption in Paul’s train of thought; it also deals with the general topic that Paul says he addressed in his first letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 5:9).
- Second Corinthians 10–13 may be from Letter 3. These four chapters are laced with harsh rebukes and bitter sarcasm that seem out of place in what is otherwise a letter of reconciliation and renewed confidence; they are more characteristic of what we would expect to find in the difficult letter that Paul says he was sorry he had to write (2 Cor. 7:8).

There is no solid evidence to support these proposals; they just make sense to some people who think that 2 Corinthians reads more consistently and smoothly when these sections are taken out and read as separate compositions.

There have been variations and expansions on these proposals: some suggest that 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1 is part of a totally different letter that wasn't even written by Paul; some think that 2 Corinthians 10–13 is from a fifth letter that Paul wrote to the Corinthians after things turned bad again.

The “patchwork epistle” theory has also been employed with regard to 2 Corinthians 8–9, which deals with the collection that Paul is taking for Jerusalem. These often are regarded as a separate fundraising letter that Paul may have written to the church on that subject, or even as two letters on the subject (chap. 8 addressed to Corinth, and chap. 9 presenting a similar appeal to the province of Achaia).

15.7

Paul in Christian Legends (Box 15.3)

Throughout the centuries, many speculative legends about Paul have been inspired by comments that he makes in 2 Corinthians.

- *Short of stature.* Second Corinthians 10:10 says that Paul had a weak bodily presence. A common tradition took this to mean that he was unusually short. Paul's very name comes from a Latin word (*paulus*) meaning "small," and this may have helped to feed traditions about his height. In any case, John Chrysostom (fourth century) called Paul "the man of three cubits," identifying him as only four feet, six inches tall. Medieval artwork typically portrays Paul as the shortest man in a painting or scene.
- *Thorn in the flesh.* Second Corinthians 12:7–10 refers to an unidentified affliction from which Paul suffered as his "thorn in the flesh." What was this problem? One second-century writing says that Paul was congenitally bowlegged. Tertullian (second–third centuries) says that Paul had chronic headaches. Clement of Alexandria (second–third centuries) suggests that Paul may have had a difficult wife (although 1 Cor. 7:7 indicates that he was unmarried). John Chrysostom (fourth–fifth centuries) thought that the thorn was Alexander the coppersmith (see 2 Tim. 4:14) or one of Paul's other opponents. Martin Luther and John Calvin thought that

Paul might be referring metaphorically to sexual temptations that he experienced as a result of his commitment to celibacy. Others have suggested a guilty conscience over persecuting the church (see 1 Cor. 15:9) or anguish over Jewish rejection of the gospel (see Rom. 9:1–3). Still others have suggested a speech impediment (to explain 2 Cor. 10:10) or poor eyesight (to explain Gal. 4:15; 6:11) or epilepsy (to explain Acts 9:3–4). A few have even proposed that Paul was possessed by a demon (taking the words “messenger of Satan” in 2 Cor. 12:7 literally).

- *Spirit journeys.* Second Corinthians 12:2–4 relates a visionary experience in which Paul (describing himself in the third person) was transported to heavenly realms. Many apocryphal tales report additional “spirit journeys” undertaken by Paul. A Greek writing from the third century tells of how he visited hell and brokered a deal for all torments to be suspended for one day each week (on Sundays); thus even the damned have Paul to thank for getting them a day off.

15.8

2 Corinthians 11:14—Angels of Light

In 2 Corinthians 11:14 Paul says that Satan sometimes disguises himself as “an angel of light”; therefore, it is not strange that people with evil intent sometimes appear righteous. The reference has caught the imagination of artists and writers throughout history. A few examples:

William Shakespeare (1564–1616), *Comedy of Errors*: Dromio warns against the wiles of a temptress: “It is written they appear to men like angels of light” (Act 4, Scene 3, line 54).

Samuel Butler (1835–1902), *The Way of All Flesh*: Ernest had hoped his marriage to Ellen would preserve him from falling into sin; when that doesn’t happen, “it seemed to him that in his attempt to be moral he had been following a devil which had disguised itself as an angel of light” (chap. 75).

William Cowper (1731–1800), “Table Talk”:

A false courtier is one
“whose trade it is to smile, to crouch, to please,
in smooth dissimulation, skilled to grace,
a devil’s purpose with an angel’s face.”

Lines 128–30

As these instances illustrate, there has been a strong tendency in literature and tradition to identify devils-disguised-as-angels with women whose beauty or charm seduces men into making unwise decisions.

A similar but slightly different sentiment informs a song made popular by **Elvis Presley** (1935–77):

You look like an angel . . .

But I got wise

You're the devil in disguise

Here the woman is more a cheater than a temptress.

In Corinth, the original offenders were men who presented themselves as “super-apostles,” touting their rhetorical skills, commendations, and worldly success as surpassing anything of which the less impressive apostle Paul could boast.

See David Lyle Jeffrey, *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992)

15.9

Generous Giving: Stewardship Principles from 2 Corinthians

Here is one sample of how 2 Corinthians 8–9 and related passages are used in Christian churches today. Fifteen “Stewardship Principles” for modern Christians are drawn from the writings of Paul.

1. Giving is both a duty and a delight, something that we ought to do and something that we are pleased to do (Rom. 15:27).
2. Giving is to be regular and systematic, according to a plan (1 Cor. 16:2).
3. Giving is a demonstration of God’s grace (2 Cor. 8:1; 9:14).
4. Giving need not be hampered by difficult circumstances, for even those who suffer affliction and experience poverty may exhibit generosity (2 Cor. 8:2).
5. Giving is to be voluntary, not compulsory (2 Cor. 8:3; 9:5, 7).
6. Giving should be proportionate to one’s income and circumstances, as each is expected to contribute according to his or her means (2 Cor. 8:3, 11–13).
7. Giving can also be undertaken as a sacrifice, as some will feel inspired to give “beyond their means” (2 Cor. 8:3).
8. Giving is a privilege, something that we appreciate being able to do as a result of God’s grace (2 Cor. 8:4).

9. Giving involves more than financial contributions: we first commit ourselves to the Lord and to the church at large (2 Cor. 8:5).
10. Giving is a witness to the gospel, demonstrating the genuineness of the church's love (2 Cor. 8:8, 24).
11. Giving may involve making a pledge that the giver is committed to fulfilling over time (2 Cor. 8:10–11).
12. Giving is to represent a personal commitment: each person is to make up his or her own mind how much to give (2 Cor. 9:7).
13. Giving is to be undertaken not reluctantly, but cheerfully (2 Cor. 9:7).
14. Giving is conducted in faith that God will provide for those who give (2 Cor. 9:8–11).
15. Giving brings glory to God and leads people to give thanks to God (2 Cor. 9:11–13).

Adapted from Mark Allan Powell, *Giving to God: The Bible's Good News about Living a Generous Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 116–17. Used by permission.

16.0

Galatians: Outline of Contents

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Courtesy of *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, ed. Mark Allan Powell (New York:

HarperCollins, 2011), 309.

16.1

Galatians in the Revised Common Lectionary

Text	Series	Liturgical Occasion	Calendar Date
1:1–12	C	Lectionary 9	May 29–June 4
1:11–24	C	Lectionary 10	June 5–11
2:15–21	C	Lectionary 11	June 12–18
3:23–29	C	Lectionary 12	June 19–25
4:4–7	B	Christmas 1	1 Sunday after Dec. 25
5:1, 13–25	C	Lectionary 13	June 26–July 2
6:(1–6) 7–16	C	Lectionary 14	July 3–9

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16.3

The Polemic of Galatians (Box 16.4)

More than any other letter, Galatians shows Paul on the attack. As one who apparently has been maligned by his opponents, he shows that he can give as good as he gets. Here are some of the charges that he makes against his opponents:

- They upset and confuse the Galatians (1:7; 5:10).
- They pervert the gospel of Christ (1:7).
- They have bewitched the Galatians (3:1).
- They are manipulative, trying to secure the Galatians' loyalty by first courting them and then making them feel excluded (4:17).
- They prevent the Galatians from obeying the truth (5:7).
- Their real motivation is to avoid persecution from Jews (6:12).
- They are hypocrites who don't obey the law themselves (6:13).
- They want to boast of their success at getting the Galatians circumcised (6:13).

Twice in this letter Paul levels a curse against his opponents (1:8–9) and once he says that he wishes they would castrate themselves (5:12).

16.4

Some Complicated Arguments (Box 16.7)

Some of the arguments that Paul uses in Galatians are difficult to follow. Perhaps these simplified reconstructions will help.

Christ Became a Curse (3:10–14)

The Bible teaches that anyone who does not keep all things written in the law is under a curse (see Deut. 27:26). So, Paul reasons, everyone is under this curse. But Scripture also says that anyone who “hangs on a tree” is cursed (see Deut. 21:23). This means that when Jesus was crucified (hung on a tree) he became a curse, and when he died the curse died with him. In this way, Christ redeemed those who were under the curse of the law.

Christ Is the Sole Beneficiary (3:15–18, 27–29)

The Bible says that God made covenant promises to Abraham and his offspring (Gen. 12:7; 22:17–18). The word “covenant” can also refer to a person’s “last will and testament,” and the collective noun “offspring” (referring to all descendants of Abraham) can also be read as a singular noun referring to one particular individual. So, with a bit of wordplay Paul proposes that God’s covenant with Abraham is like a person’s will and that the beneficiary of that will is only one person, Jesus Christ. The law of Moses was given long after Abraham and does not annul Christ’s inheritance as the sole

beneficiary of the promise to Abraham. Furthermore, although Christ is the sole heir to the promise, people who trust in Christ can be clothed with Christ through baptism (Gal. 3:27) and become one in Christ (3:28). By virtue of being “in Christ” they too become Abraham’s singular offspring and heirs of the promise (3:29).

Two Mothers Stand for Two Covenants (4:21–31)

The Bible reports that Abraham had children by two women: his son Isaac was born to his wife, Sarah, and was his heir; another son, Ishmael, was born to the slave woman Hagar and so was not his heir (see Gen. 16:15; 21:2, 9–10). These women, Paul suggests in Galatians, provide an allegory for understanding two covenants. People who trust in the covenant of the law (given by Moses on Sinai) are like the child of Hagar: they are physically descended from Abraham but are not heirs to the promise; indeed, they are enslaved to the law (Gal. 4:25; cf. 2:4; 5:1). But those who trust in Christ are children of a new covenant, and they are like Isaac, true heirs for whom God’s promise to Abraham is being fulfilled.

16.5

Barnabas

The book of Acts refers frequently to an important leader in the church named Barnabas (pronounced bahr´nuh-buhs). His name was actually Joseph but the apostles in Jerusalem decided to call him “Barnabas,” which in Hebrew means “son of encouragement” (Acts 4:36).

This renaming was in sync with the practice of Jesus who decided to call one of his disciples “Peter” (“rock” in Greek), even though his birth name was Simon.

Neither “Peter” nor “Barnabas” is known to have been used as names prior to these applications by Jesus and the apostles.

In any case, Barnabas was a Levite from Cyprus, and so, a Jew from the Diaspora who had perhaps moved to Jerusalem, or perhaps was simply visiting when he encountered the Christian community there. He became a member of that early church quite early, though there is no reason to believe he was among the 120 on the day of Pentecost. More likely, he could have been among the 3,000 added to the church on that day (Acts 2:41), though that is also just speculation.

Barnabas was a cousin of John Mark (Col. 4:10) and soon became a leader in the church. He is first mentioned as the prime example of believers who took seriously the community’s commitment to hold all

things in common. He sold a field and laid the money at the apostles' feet to be used by the community as a whole (Acts 4:36–37). In this way, he is presented as the antithesis of Ananias and Sapphira, two greedy Christians who sought to take advantage of the “all things in common” policy by living out of the common purse while also holding on to their own private resources (Acts 5:1–10).

According to Acts, Barnabas was the person who introduced Saul (Paul) to the apostles in Jerusalem (9:27). Naturally, the apostles were initially suspicious of Saul, a new convert who had viciously persecuted them, but when Barnabas vouched for him they were more accepting.

Later Barnabas appears in Antioch, where he was sent as a representative of the Jerusalem church (11:19–26). He affirms the mission to the gentiles there and works with Saul as senior partner or supervisor of a Christian mission in Syria-Cilicia. Acts further reports that Barnabas and Saul took the famine offering from Antioch to Jerusalem (11:27–30; 12:25).

Paul and Barnabas traveled together on a mission tour to Cyprus and to the Iconium region of Asia Minor (13:1–14:28). They also appeared together at the Jerusalem council (15:1–35) but later disagreed over the question of allowing John Mark to accompany them on a second mission trip (15:36–41).

The problem was that John Mark had cut short his participation in an earlier mission (13:13). Paul took this to mean he was unreliable, but

Barnabas stood by his cousin. The dispute was so acrimonious that Barnabas and Paul had to part company and go their separate ways. The narrative in Acts follows Paul, who replaces Barnabas with Silas, and heads for Asia Minor and what is now Greece (Macedonia and Achaia). We are told almost in passing that Barnabas and Mark took off on a similar journey to Cyprus, where they both had worked with Paul previously (Acts 15:39; cf. 13:4). Nothing more is reported of this trip or its outcome.

Elsewhere, Barnabas is mentioned with reference to a dispute in Antioch over whether circumcised and uncircumcised believers should eat together (Gal. 2:11–14). According to Acts 15:1–35, Barnabas was a strong defender of not binding circumcision on gentile converts, as was Peter, but he and Peter apparently sided against Paul with regard to the related question of mixed table fellowship.

A mid-second-century document called the Epistle of Barnabas was accepted as an authentic work by Paul's associate by some leaders in the early church (Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria) but is universally regarded as pseudepigraphical today.

The book of Acts speaks of Barnabas as “a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith” (11:24). Paul, despite their problems, seems to regard Barnabas as an apostle in 1 Corinthians 9:1–6. The latter reference is especially noteworthy, since Paul and Barnabas are the only two people called “apostles” in the book of Acts who had not

been members of “the twelve” or among those who had known the earthly Jesus (Acts 14:4, 14; cf. 1:15–26).

According to a survey by Wayne O. McCready, Barnabas is primarily remembered in later tradition and literature in two distinct ways:¹

- First, Barnabas becomes something of a metaphor for a mentor who is surpassed by a pupil, especially when this pleases the mentor. One might say, “I played Barnabas to his Paul,” meaning, “I was honored to help him get started, but he has accomplished more than I ever did.” So Ghirlandaio could be regarded as Barnabas to Michelangelo’s Paul, and Anne Sullivan could be regarded as Barnabas to Helen Keller’s Paul (though the expression is not typically used for women).
- Second, Barnabas becomes a symbol for missionary work in which congregations are able to support ministry in other locales. John Milton in his *De Doctrina Christiana* laid out a plan to create a class of “extraordinary ministers” within the church patterned on the work of Barnabas, who was sent from the established church in Jerusalem to aid the developing community in Antioch.² Elsewhere, Milton makes a similar case with specific reference to financial resources: the sending of Barnabas from Jerusalem to Antioch provides the model for wealthier congregations to support ministry in surrounding villages.³

1. Wayne O. McCready, "Barnabas," in *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition and English Literature*, ed. David Lyle Jeffrey (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 76.
2. John Milton, "Of the Visible Church," in *De Doctrina Christiana* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1825), 1.29.
3. John Milton, *Considerations Touching the Likeliest Means to Remove Hirelings out of the Church* (London: T.N. for L. Chapman, 1659), n.p.

16.6

James and the Other Brothers of Jesus (Box 25.1)

The Synoptic Gospels report that Jesus had four brothers—James, Joses, Judas, and Simon—plus an unknown number of sisters whose names are also unknown (Mark 6:3). Since James is listed first, he is often thought to be the oldest of these brothers, although perhaps he is listed first simply because he was the one who became best known.

The Gospels indicate that the brothers of Jesus did not “believe in him” during the time of his ministry (John 7:5). At one point they attempt to seize him and take him home for a forced retirement from doing and saying things that are leading people to think he is “beside himself” (Mark 3:21, 31–35). The Gospel of John even presents Jesus on the cross choosing one of his disciples to care for his mother after his death, which seems like an affront to James and his other brothers (John 19:25–27).

After Easter, things changed. Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians that the risen Jesus appeared to James (1 Cor. 15:7). The book of Acts indicates that the brothers of Jesus (all of them?) were part of the early church in Jerusalem (Acts 1:14) and, apparently, were present for the great event on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1–4). A short while later, James appears to be the leader of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 12:17; 21:18). He presides over the apostolic

council described in Acts 15 and offers a final authoritative ruling that he expects to be disseminated and accepted by Christians everywhere (Acts 15:19–29; 21:25).

James's importance as a leader in the church is also acknowledged by Paul in Galatians, albeit somewhat grudgingly (Gal. 1:19; 2:6, 9). Paul disagreed sharply with James's policies regarding the continued relevance of certain markers of Jewish identity within the Christian community (Gal. 2:11–14). Still, he devoted a considerable portion of his ministry to supervising a collection for Christians in Jerusalem, where James was the recognized leader (Rom. 15:25–29; 2 Cor. 8–9).

The Jewish historian Josephus reports that James was murdered in 62 (see *Jewish Antiquities* 20.199–201). During an interim between on-site Roman rulers (when “Festus was dead and Albinus was still on the way”), the high priest Ananus II seized the opportunity to move against those whom he considered to be lawbreakers. He convened the judges of the Sanhedrin and delivered James and certain others to be stoned. Josephus notes that “the inhabitants of the city who were considered to be the most fair-minded and who were strict in their observance of the law were offended at this.” Furthermore, Josephus maintains that the action was judged to be illegal, and Ananus II subsequently was deposed by the new procurator on this account. A later Christian tradition, reported by Clement of Alexandria (third century), says that James was killed by

being thrown off the pinnacle of the temple, but this account is generally regarded as legendary.

Other traditions about James emphasize his traditional Jewish piety and his devotion to the law. Eusebius (fourth century) reports that he received his nickname “the Just” because he lived as a Nazirite, an ascetic who was especially devoted to God. Another oft-repeated tradition (reported by Eusebius) holds that James spent so much time praying in the temple that his knees became as calloused as those of a camel.

The apocryphal *Gospel of Thomas* (first or second century) contains an overwhelmingly positive affirmation of James. In one curious passage, Jesus’s disciples ask him who their leader will be after he departs; he answers, “You are to go to James the Just, for whose sake heaven and earth came into being” (*Gospel of Thomas* 12).

We have only a little information about the other brothers of Jesus. Paul refers to them as Christian missionaries, noting specifically that (unlike him) they were married and often accompanied by their wives (1 Cor. 9:5). Judas (= Jude) is the putative author of another New Testament letter.

16.7

Circumcision (Box 16.1)

Circumcision is a surgical procedure that removes the foreskin of a penis. It has been and still is practiced by many cultures for a variety of reasons: it is sometimes cosmetic or linked to health concerns, but in many traditions the rite has taken on symbolic meaning connected with puberty, fertility, or spiritual devotion.

In ancient Israel male children typically were circumcised on the eighth day of their life (Gen. 17:12; Lev. 12:3). Both Jesus (Luke 1:59; 2:21) and Paul (Phil. 3:5) are said to have been circumcised in keeping with this sacred tradition, which still is practiced by Jewish people today.

In Israelite and Jewish religion circumcision was regarded as “the sign of the covenant”: males were circumcised to indicate that they belonged to the chosen people of God, that they were heirs of the promises to Abraham, and that they intended to keep the Torah, given by God to Moses. Prophets sometimes spoke of circumcision in symbolic terms, accusing those who were stubborn or unreceptive of having an uncircumcised ear (Jer. 6:10) or an “uncircumcised heart” (Lev. 26:41).

The apostle Paul favors the symbolic meaning of circumcision (Rom. 2:29) but regards the physical act as irrelevant, since all people are now made right with God through Christ (1 Cor. 7:19; Gal. 5:6; 6:15).

Paul's strong opposition to circumcision voiced in certain passages (e.g., Gal. 5:2) has nothing to do with the value of the act itself: he is not opposed to Jews (or gentiles) observing religious traditions that they find meaningful, but he is incensed by the notion that any such tradition is necessary to affect one's status with God, which, for Paul, is maintained solely by grace through faith.

16.8

Circumcision in the Biblical Period

Circumcision (the removal of the foreskin of the penis) was practiced as a religious ritual among many cultures of the Ancient Near East. In ancient Israel and in Judaism, circumcision was routinely performed on infants boys eight days after birth (Gen. 17:12; Lev. 12:3; Luke 1:59; 2:21; Phil. 3:5), though circumstances might permit or require circumcisions be performed on adolescents (cf. Gen. 17:25) or even on grooms (cf. Gen. 34:14–24). The Hebrews attributed different aspects of the practice to divine injunctions made to Abraham (Gen. 17:9–27), to Joshua (Josh. 5:2–7), and to Israel (Lev. 12:1–5; cf. Exod. 12:44, 48). In one passage (Exod. 4:24–26), Zipporah, the wife of Moses, is credited with saving her husband’s life by circumcising their son.

In Genesis 17:11, circumcision is said to serve as a “sign” of God’s covenant with Israel; though this would remain the primary meaning, circumcision also acquired a figurative sense. Persons who are deemed “to have uncircumcised ears” are considered to be unreceptive, haughty, and proud (Jer. 6:10), while those who have an “uncircumcised heart” are considered to be stubborn (Lev. 26:41; Ezek. 44:7, 9; cf. Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4; Rom. 2:28–29).

During the Hellenistic period, circumcision became a central issue between assimilationists and nationalists. To avoid scorn (cf.

Horace, *Satires* I.v.95; ix.70; Martial, *Epigrams* vii, lxxii, 5, 6, etc.), some Hellenized Jews underwent painful surgery to restore the foreskin (1 Macc. 1:15; 1 Cor. 7:18; Josephus, *Antiquities* 12.5.1). Antiochus Epiphanes played into the hands of the more Hellenistic Jews by forbidding circumcision on pain of death (1 Macc. 1:48, 60). Later, during the Hasmonean period (second to mid-first centuries BCE), the tables were turned and the Jews who were now in power forced circumcision on others, including the Edomites and the Itureans (Josephus, *Jewish War* 13.9.1; 13.11.3). Still later, in the Roman period, the emperor Hadrian once again forbade circumcision, and this helped to trigger the Bar-Kochba revolt (132–35 CE).

In early Christianity, the merits of continuing circumcision were debated but the rite was ultimately determined unnecessary for those who were baptized into Christ (cf. Acts 15 and Rom. 2:29; Col. 2:11; 1 Cor. 7:19; Gal. 6:15). Nevertheless, the church thought it important to remember that Jesus had been circumcised (Luke 2:21), and Paul, who referred to those who argued for the continuance of circumcision as “those who mutilate the flesh” (Phil. 3:2), could nevertheless speak positively of his circumcision as one whose righteousness under the law was blameless (Phil. 3:5–6). The apparent explanation for this anomaly is that Paul and other early Christians wanted to maintain that circumcision had been a valid (divinely mandated) practice in its time, but that the need for circumcision had been abrogated by Christ’s death and resurrection,

which initiated a new covenant with God (e.g., 1 Cor. 11:25; 2 Cor. 3:6; Heb. 8:13). Paul also seizes on the figurative uses of circumcision in the Bible to speak of a circumcision that is of the spirit rather than of the flesh (Rom. 2:29; Phil. 3:3).

16.9

The Incident at Antioch (Box 16.5)

The crisis at Antioch, reported by Paul in Galatians 2, was sparked by the issue of table fellowship: representatives of James (brother of Jesus and leader of the Jerusalem church) encouraged the Jewish Christians in that community to observe Jewish dietary laws, even though this required them to separate themselves from the gentile Christians when the community shared meals together, including, we might assume, celebrations of the Lord's Supper.

Such a policy probably was presented as a mediating "separate but equal" position: let the gentiles who become Christians live as gentiles, and the Jews who become Christians live as Jews. Paul would have none of it, rejecting both parts of that proposal as hypocrisy (Gal. 2:13).

Let the Gentiles Who Become Christians Live as Gentiles

Paul thinks that it is hypocritical to claim that the policy of separate tables allows gentiles to live as gentiles, because the actual effect is to "compel the Gentiles to live like Jews" (Gal. 2:14). He does not explain exactly why that is the case, but the point may be that the policy marginalizes gentiles within the community and puts social pressure on them to become law-observant like the respected church leaders who eat at the Jewish Christian table.

Let the Jews Who Become Christians Live as Jews

Paul claims that Jews who become Christians actually live as gentiles in the only sense that matters: they live as people who have been justified by faith in Jesus Christ, just as the gentiles are (2:15–16). It is hypocritical for Jews to live as gentiles in this sense (trusting in Christ for justification) and still claim to be living as Jews just because they keep dietary laws.

The book of *Jubilees*, written around the time of Jesus (give or take fifty years), offers this advice to Jews:

- Separate yourselves from the gentiles, and do not eat with them.
- Do not perform deeds like theirs, and do not become associates of theirs, because their deeds are defiled, and all of their ways are contaminated, and despicable, and abominable. (*Jubilees* 22:16)

Compared to that standard, Paul’s opponents probably thought that they were being generous in sharing a meal with gentiles, albeit at separate tables. But Paul thought that “the truth of the gospel” demanded that Jews and gentiles eat together without any distinction (Gal. 2:11–14; see also 3:28).

16.10

What to Do with Gentiles (Box 16.6)

Widespread conversion of gentiles forced the early Christian church to face several important questions. Robert Gundry lists these:

- Should gentile Christians be required to submit to circumcision and practice the Jewish way of life, as gentile proselytes to Judaism were required to do?
- To those gentile Christians unwilling to become wholly Jewish, should the church grant a second-class citizenship, as for gentile “God-fearers” in Judaism?
- What makes a person Christian: faith in Christ solely, or faith in Christ plus adherence to the principles and practices of Judaism?

See Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament*, 5th ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 388.

16.11

Did Paul Have Bad Eyesight? (Box 16.3)

- He says that he suffered from a “physical infirmity” (Gal. 4:13) and from a “thorn” in the flesh (2 Cor. 12:7).
- He says that the Galatians would have given him their own eyes to help him had it been possible (Gal. 4:15).
- His handwriting is recognizable because of the exceptionally large letters that he makes (Gal. 6:11).
- He is said to have been temporarily blinded (Acts 9:8), and when his sight is restored, “something like scales” fall from his eyes (Acts 9:18).
- He fails to recognize the high priest when appearing before the Jewish council in Jerusalem (Acts 23:4–5).

Such considerations have led to speculation: Did he have cataracts or some other eye problem? Was he partially blind?

16.12

Galatians 3:28 in Roman and Jewish Perspective

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul writes, “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (3:28). The radical sense of this proclamation may be set in contrast to more common perspectives regarding race, class, and gender in Paul’s world. Paul was both Jewish and Roman, but what he wrote in Galatians would be striking to either Jewish or Roman audiences.

A Roman Perspective

Diogenes Laertius says that Socrates, the wisest of the wise, said there were three blessings for which he was grateful to Fortune: “First, that I was born a human being and not one of the brutes; next, that I was born a man and not a woman; third, a Greek and not a barbarian” (*Lives of the Philosophers* 1.33).

It is highly unlikely that Socrates actually said anything of the kind—but the fact that an influential author would put such words on his lips indicates that these three conditions would indeed be considered blessings in Greco-Roman society (at least among the literate Greek men who comprised Laertius’s audience).

A Jewish Perspective

The Babylonian Talmud contains a story that almost qualifies as a Jewish variation on Laertius's account. Here, it is reported that Rabbi Judah used to say three blessings daily: "Blessed art thou who hast not made me a heathen; Blessed art thou who hast not made me a woman; and Blessed art thou who hast not made me a brutish man."

The story continues by noting that a certain Rabbi Aha b. Jacob overheard his son praying these three blessings and told him to add another: "Blessed art thou who has not made me a slave." His son responded, "And is not that the same as a woman?" The rabbi replied, "A slave is more contemptible" (*Menahoth* 43b).

Of course, Paul was not the only "enlightened thinker" of his day. Other Roman and Jewish leaders were ready to embrace the philosophy encapsulated in Galatians 3:28—at least in theory. History and culture have revealed that even those who profess the inclusive creed must work to discern its practical implications. Many would say that Paul sometimes failed to do so himself.

16.13

Northern and Southern Galatian Theories (Box 16.2)

“Northern Galatian Theory”—Sequence of Events

- Paul evangelizes cities in southern Galatia (Acts 13:14–15; 14:1).
- Conference takes place in Jerusalem (Acts 15; Gal. 2:1–10).
- Paul evangelizes Galatian tribes in northern Galatia (Acts 16:6; 18:5).
- Paul writes the Letter to the Galatians to churches in northern Galatia.

The Northern Galatian Theory recognizes that the people usually known as the “Galatians” lived in the northern part of the province visited by Paul after the Jerusalem conference.

“Southern Galatian Theory”—Sequence of Events

- Paul evangelizes cities in southern Galatia (Acts 13:14–15; 14:1).
- Paul meets with church leaders in Jerusalem (Gal. 2:1–10).
- Paul writes the Letter to the Galatians to churches in southern Galatia.
- Conference takes place in Jerusalem (Acts 15).

The Southern Galatian Theory resolves what would be inconsistencies between Galatians 2:1–10 and Acts 15 if these passages were viewed as describing the same event.

16.14

Adoption as a Metaphor for Salvation

The apostle Paul sometimes uses the word “adoption” as a metaphor for salvation:

- “we wait for adoption” (Rom. 8:23)
- “They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption” (Rom. 9:4).
- “He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ” (Eph. 1:5).

The metaphor is developed in two passages, one from Galatians and one from Romans:

When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God. (Gal. 4:4–7)

All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint

heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him. (Rom. 8:14–17)

Thus Paul indicates that people become adopted as heirs of God through faith (by virtue of the mediation of the Son and the Spirit), and are thus able to call God “Father” in an intimate way (“Abba” being an affectionate term Jewish children would use for addressing their fathers). The image draws meaning from the realities of belonging, connectedness, relationship, and inheritance implied by literal adoption.

As background for this metaphor, Paul may be drawing on:

- adopted relationships among humans found in the Bible (e.g., Gen. 15:1–3; Exod. 2:10; Esther 2:7, 15)
- God’s election of Israel (e.g., Hosea 11:1; Exod. 4:22)
- Greco-Roman customs regarding the manumission and subsequent adoption of slaves.

There has been some discussion concerning how literally we should take Paul’s reference to people being adopted as sons (a phrase that is consistently translated “as children” in the NRSV).

Specifically, many critics (especially feminists) have challenged the NRSV translations of these phrases:

- “so that we might receive adoption as children” (Gal. 4:5)

- “we are children of God, and if children, then heirs” (Rom. 8:16–17)

A better translation, these critics hold, would be:

- “so that we might receive adoption as sons” (Gal. 4:5)
- “we are sons of God, and if sons, then heirs” (Rom. 8:16–17)

Obviously, the NRSV translators were trying to be inclusive, emphasizing that God’s salvation is for women and men alike but, some critics say, the well-intentioned translations missed the point.

Paul insists that those who are adopted by God become “heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:17). Paul assumes a cultural situation in which inheritance laws were different for men than for women: sons typically receive a better inheritance than daughters.

What Paul wants to emphasize is that, through Jesus Christ, all people may be adopted by God not merely as children but as sons, favored to receive the best possible inheritance. Jews and gentiles are adopted as sons; slaves and free persons are adopted as sons; and, indeed, men and women are both adopted as sons (and receive the same favored inheritance).

16.15

The New Perspective on Paul: A Brief Essay

Toward the end of the twentieth century, a revolution in Pauline studies brought to the fore an understanding of Paul's theology called the "new perspective."¹ This terminology assumes that there was an "old perspective" on Paul (though, of course, no one ever called it that at the time).

The discussion concerns an assessment of Paul's belief in "justification by grace" and of the importance that this had for his understanding of his own life and theology. The theme of justification by grace is prominent in two of Paul's letters (Romans, Galatians): Paul insists that people are put in a right relationship with God at God's initiative, as a result of God's mercy and love rather than because of anything that they have done to earn God's favor. The Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century produced an understanding of Paul that focused on this motif in two ways.

First, the Reformers saw justification by grace as the center of Paul's thought; all the other things that he said could be regarded as implications of this one fundamental concept. Second, the Reformers understood justification by grace to be the doctrine that separated Paul from the Judaism of his day, which taught some form of "works righteousness" (i.e., the notion that people gain a right standing with God by doing good works and being obedient to God's

commandments). Thus the “old perspective” on Paul was that he was converted from a legalistic Pharisaism that told him that he had to earn favor with God to a grace-oriented Christianity that told him that God accepted him just as he was. He was converted from a religion of guilt to a religion of love.

This understanding of Paul went virtually unchallenged for four hundred years, and then scholars began to question some of its key presuppositions. First, scholars asked whether it is proper to make justification by grace so central to Pauline thought. He does not mention it at all in several of his letters, and in the critical sections where it is discussed, his primary purpose seems to be defending the rights of gentiles as full heirs of God’s promises to Israel.² The specific question for Paul was whether gentile converts must accept the Jewish law in order to become part of God’s chosen people, and what he says about justification by grace must be understood in that context.³

Second, a number of scholars have insisted that the Pharisaism of Paul’s day was not in fact a legalistic religion of works righteousness. The Pharisees believed that they stood in a right relationship with God through grace, on account of God’s covenant with Israel. They did not believe that they had to keep the law in order to earn God’s favor; rather, they delighted in keeping the law as a way to observe the covenant that God had made with them. Furthermore, Paul never indicates that he found his pre-Christian life burdensome, nor does

he refer to his life prior to his encounter with Christ as a time when he felt the need to attain salvation through his own efforts or merit (cf. Phil. 3:6).⁴

Separate and Exclusive

The new perspective suggests that Paul's ongoing conflict with his Jewish contemporaries concerned tendencies not toward legalism but rather toward separatism and exclusivism. God had revealed to Paul that, through Christ, salvation was available to all humanity. Thus Paul objected to "works of the law" not because they were construed as good works that could earn God's favor but, rather, because they were regarded as marks of ethnic privilege. Circumcision, dietary regulations, Sabbath laws, and the like were intended to set Israel apart from other nations so that Israel might remain God's elite chosen people.

According to the new perspective on Paul, justification by grace in itself was not a new concept; the Jews had always believed that they were justified by grace through God's covenant with Israel. What was new in Paul's gospel was that justification by grace now came through faith in Jesus Christ, and this claim had radical implications for all humanity: it was no longer exclusive to Israel. The controversial point in Paul's teaching was not the basic idea of people being put right with God through grace rather than through works; the controversial point was that gentiles could now become equal partners with Jews as part of the people of God.

New Perspective on Paul: An Example

What does this verse mean?

For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law. (Rom. 3:28)

Traditional Interpretation

People are put right with God by trusting in what God has graciously done through Jesus Christ rather than by doing things that would earn God's favor. In this view, "works of the law" = meritorious acts of human achievement (keeping commandments, performing good works, etc.).

New Perspective

People are put right with God by trusting in what God has graciously done through Jesus Christ rather than by being faithful to the covenant that God made with Israel. In this view, "works of the law" = covenant markers that identify Jews as belonging to God's chosen nation (circumcision, Sabbath observance, dietary restrictions, etc.).

This new perspective on Paul has met with widespread acceptance and has altered the way many scholars understand various matters that come up in Paul's letters.⁵ Many interpreters think the new perspective offers a more authentic way of understanding Paul's writings, reading them in light of first-century conflicts between Jews and gentiles rather than in light of sixteenth-century conflicts between Protestants and Roman Catholics.

Some critics, however, caution that the “new perspective” has gone too far.⁶ They maintain that some Jews in the first century did indeed view obedience to the law as a means to earn God’s favor (just as some Christians in every age have thought this) and that part of Paul’s emphasis on grace is directed against such notions (Rom. 4:4–5; 10:3).⁷ More to the point, some scholars claim that the new perspective on Paul shifts the primary focus of Paul’s concern from a vertical emphasis on how people relate to God to a horizontal emphasis on how God’s people relate to one another. Critics of the new perspective grant that Paul addresses manifold questions of how Jews and gentiles should relate to one another, but they claim that these are only the implications of a fundamental concern for how all human beings (Jew or gentile) are brought into a right relationship with God. Thus justification by grace is not important to Paul just as a means to an end, the end being reconciliation of humanity; it is, in itself, of primary importance, and the reconciliation of humanity follows as an inevitable consequence.

Discussion of these matters will continue. The debates (What is primary? What is secondary?) may seem somewhat pedantic to beginning students, but decisions on such matters do end up affecting interpretation of individual Bible passages, which in turn affect the preaching and teaching of Scripture in various Christian communities.

1. James D. G. Dunn is credited with coining the phrase “new perspective on Paul” during a 1982 lecture now published as “The New Perspective on Paul,” in *Jesus*,

Paul, and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1990), 123–33. See also James D. G. Dunn, *The New Perspective on Paul*, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2007).

2. See Krister Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976).

3. E. P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (London: SCM, 1983), 20.

4. See E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977).

5. Well-known advocates include James D. G. Dunn, E. P. Sanders, and N. T. Wright. See also Terence L. Donaldson, *Paul and the Gentiles: Remapping the Apostle's Convictional World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997); Francis Watson, *Paul, Judaism, and the Gentiles: Beyond the New Perspective*, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007).

6. For a good summary of the criticisms, see D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 375–85. See also Seyoon Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective: Second Thoughts on the Origin of Paul's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); Timo Laato, *Paul and Judaism: An Anthropological Approach*, trans. T. McElwain, SFSHJ 115 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995); Thomas R. Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment: A Pauline Theology of Law* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1993); Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003); and the essays collected in D. A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien, and Mark O. Seifrid, eds., *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001–4).

7. See Mark Seifrid, *Christ, Our Righteousness: Paul's Theology of Justification*, NSBT (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000); Mark Seifrid, *Justification by Faith: The Origin and Development of a Central Pauline Theme*, NovTSup 68 (Leiden: Brill, 1992); Peter Stuhlmacher, *Revisiting Paul's Doctrine of Justification: A Challenge to the New Perspective* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

16.16

Does Galatians Contain “Twenty-Nine Distinct Damnations”?

Robert Browning wrote a famous poem called “Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister” (1842), which presents a tongue-in-cheek dramatic monologue by a monk who has been made perversely jealous by the moral superiority of a colleague named Brother Lawrence.

The speaker in the poem expresses his hope that Brother Lawrence will fall into some dire temptation; the best-case scenario would be if he committed mortal sin and subsequently died before getting to confession. Then he would be damned to hell (despite his exemplary virtuous life).

Thus Browning mocks religious hypocrisy and the supposed absurdities of Roman Catholic theology (as he understood it).

In any case, lines 49–56 of the poem read as follows:

There’s a great text in Galatians,
Once you trip on it, entails
Twenty-nine distinct damnations,
One sure, if another fails;
If I trip him just a-dying,
Sure of heaven as sure can be,
Spin him round and send him flying
Off to hell, a Manichee?

The speaker's secret weapon is Paul's letter to the Galatians (or some portion thereof), which if one can find it ("trip on it") reveals twenty-nine ways to be damned. Surely one of these will work for the saintly Brother Lawrence, for whom there will then be no more hope than for the heretics who espouse Manichaeism.

Biblical scholars have spent a century trying to discern what text or combination of texts Browning had in mind. Granted, Paul was mad when he wrote the latter and there are threats of condemnation—but *twenty-nine distinct damnations?*

The general consensus today is that no such texts are evident. The point, probably, was that the speaker was sufficiently deranged to have found twenty-nine paths to damnation in Paul's letter that would have eluded most exegetes. Thus one of the morals of the poem could be that one can find in the Bible whatever one is looking for.

16.17

Galatians 1:22–23—Persecutor to Proclaimer

John Irving's 1989 novel *A Prayer for Owen Meany* traces the story of an odd and troubled boy who believes himself to be God's instrument and sets out to fulfill the role that God has determined for him. Although Owen is never hostile to Christian believers in the manner that the apostle Paul was initially, he does undergo a transformation that is surprising to many—and, in that sense, he might be likened to Paul.

In the novel, the story of Owen Meany is told by a man who had been Owen's childhood friend. He sums up his recollection of Owen's total life with reference to Galatians 1:22–23:

How can I *not* think of Owen—when I read Paul's letter to the Galatians, that part where Paul says, "And I was still not known by sight to the churches of Christ in Judea; they only heard it said, 'He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.' And they glorified God because of me."

How well I know that feeling! I trust in God because of Owen Meany.¹

1. John Irving, *A Prayer for Owen Meany* (1989; repr. New York: William Morrow, 2012), 87.

16.18

Galatians 2:20—Christ in Me

In Galatians 2:20 Paul writes, “It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me.”

John Gabriel Perboyre (1802–40) was a French priest who served as a missionary in China, where he became a martyr. He was canonized in 1996. He is best remembered by many for a prayer attributed to him, a prayer that concludes with words from Galatians 2:20.

O my Divine Saviour,
Transform me into Yourself.
May my hands be the hands of Jesus.
Grant that every faculty of my body
May serve only to glorify You.
Above all,
Transform my soul and all its powers
So that my memory, will and affection
May be the memory, will and affections
Of Jesus.
I pray You
To destroy in me
All that is not of You.
Grant that I may live
But in You, by You and for You,
So that I may truly say,

With St. Paul,

“I live—now not I—

But Christ lives in me.”

16.19

Distinctions Cancelled (Box 16.8)

Diogenes Laertius says that Socrates, the wisest of the wise, is reported to have said there were three blessings for which he was grateful to Fortune: “First, that I was born a human being and not one of the brutes; next, that I was born a man and not a woman; third, a Greek and not a barbarian.”¹

Paul writes, “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28).

1. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, trans. R. D. Hicks (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925), §1.33.

17.0

Ephesians: Outline of Contents

- I. Address (1:1–2)
- II. The church as a fellowship of the redeemed (1:3–3:21)
 - A. Praise of God (1:3–14)
 - B. Intercession (1:15–23)
 - C. Life from death (2:1–10)
 - D. Jew and gentile reconciled (2:11–22)
 - E. Paul's ministry in revelation (3:1–13)
 - F. Renewed intercession (3:14–21)
- III. Life among the redeemed (4:1–6:20)
 - A. Unity and diversity in service (4:1–16)
 - B. The old life and the new (4:17–24)
 - C. Christians in their communities (4:25–5:14)
 - D. How Christians should live together (5:15–6:9)
 - E. The Christian's armor (6:10–20)
- IV. Closing greetings (6:21–24)

Courtesy of *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, ed. Mark Allan Powell (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 244.

17.1

Ephesians in the Revised Common Lectionary

Text	Series	Liturgical Occasion	Calendar Date
1:3–14	A, B, C	Christmas 2	2 Sundays after Dec. 25
1:3–14	B	Lectionary 15	July 10–16
1:11–23	C	All Saints' Day	Nov. 1
1:15–23	A, B, C	Ascension Day	6 Thursdays before Easter
1:15–23	A	Christ the King	Nov. 20–26
2:1–10	B	Lent 4	3 Sundays before Easter
2:11–22	B	Lectionary 16	July 17–23
3:1–12	A, B, C	Epiphany Day	Jan. 6
3:14–21	B	Lectionary 17	July 24–30
4:1–16	B	Lectionary 18	July 31–Aug 6
4:25–5:2	B	Lectionary 19	Aug. 7–13
5:8–14	A	Lent 4	3 Sundays before Easter
5:15–20	B	Lectionary 20	Aug. 14–20
6:10–20	B	Lectionary 21	Aug. 21–27

17.2

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17.3

Parallels between Ephesians and Colossians (Box

17.1)

Similar topics are treated, often in the same order and sometimes with identical wording.

Topic	Ephesians	Colossians
Redemption and forgiveness	1:7	1:14–20
All things in heaven and earth are in Christ	1:10	1:20
I have heard of your faith	1:15	1:4
I thank God always for you	1:16	1:3
Pray that God will give you wisdom	1:17	1:9
Riches of a glorious inheritance/mystery	1:18	1:27
God made you alive	2:5	2:13
Aliens reconciled through Christ's death	2:12–13	1:21–22
Christ has abolished the law	2:15	2:14
Paul is suffering for their sake	3:1	1:24
Divine commission given to Paul	3:2	1:25
Divine mystery made known to Paul	3:3	1:26
Paul a servant of the gospel	3:7	1:23, 25
Lead a worthy life	4:1	1:10
Humility, meekness, patience	4:2	3:12
Bear with one another	4:2	3:13
Christ is head of the body	4:15–16	2:19
Put off old nature, put on new nature	4:22–32	3:5–10, 12
Let there be no immorality among you	5:3–6	3:5–9
Walk wisely and make the most of your time	5:15	4:5
Sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs	5:19	3:16
Give thanks to God	5:20	3:17
Tables of household duties	5:21–6:9	3:18–4:1
for wives	5:22–24	3:18
for husbands	5:25–33	3:19
for children	6:1–3	3:20
for fathers	6:4	3:21

for slaves	6:5–8	3:22–25
for masters	6:9	4:1
Paul the prisoner exhorts persistence in prayer	6:18–20	4:2–3
Tychicus will inform church about Paul	6:21	4:7
Tychicus sent to encourage their hearts	6:22	4:8

Indebted to Charles B. Puskas Jr., *The Letters of Paul: An Introduction* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993), 130–31.

17.4

Distinctive Aspects of Ephesians (Box 17.2)

Ephesians is different in certain ways from what are called Paul's "undisputed letters."

Distinctive Wording

- It contains extremely long sentences (in Greek, 1:3–14 is one sentence, as are 1:15–23; 3:1–7).
- It makes repetitive use of adjectives and synonyms (1:19 uses four words for "power").
- It makes abundant use of the word "all" (about fifty times).
- It uses "devil" (4:27; 6:11) instead of "Satan" (Rom. 16:20; 1 Cor. 5:5; 7:5; 2 Cor. 2:11; 11:14; 12:7; 1 Thess. 2:18).
- It refers to Paul as "least of all the saints" (3:8) rather than as "least of the apostles" (1 Cor. 15:9).
- Christ (4:11) rather than God (1 Cor. 12:28) is the one who appoints apostles, prophets, and others in the church.
- The church is the body with Christ as head (1:22–23; cf. Col. 1:18) rather than being the whole body of Christ with the head as one of its members (1 Cor. 12:19–20, 27).
- Readers are told to imitate God (5:1) rather than Paul (1 Cor. 4:6; 11:1; Phil. 3:17; but cf. 1 Thess. 1:6).

- It uses “kingdom of Christ and of God” (5:5; cf. Col. 1:13) rather than “kingdom of God” (Rom. 14:17; 1 Cor. 4:20; 6:9, 10; 15:50; Gal. 5:21; 1 Thess. 2:12).
- People are “saved” by faith (2:5, 8) rather than “justified” by faith (Rom. 3:28; 5:1; Gal. 2:16; 3:24).
- It speaks of works as “good works” (2:9–10) rather than as “works of the law” (Gal. 2:16; 3:2, 5, 10, 12).
- It uses “church” for the universal church (1:22; 3:10, 21; 5:23, 24, 25, 27, 29, 32) rather than for a local congregation (e.g., Rom. 16:23; 1 Cor. 4:17; 14:23; but cf. 1 Cor. 10:32; 15:9).
- It refers to Christ as “the Beloved” (1:6), an expression not used for Christ in Paul’s undisputed letters (but cf. Col. 1:13).
- It speaks of “the heavenly places” (1:3, 20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12) rather than simply “heaven” (1 Cor. 8:5; 2 Cor. 12:2; Phil. 3:20) or “the heavens” (2 Cor. 5:1).
- The church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ as the cornerstone (2:19–20), rather than on the foundation of Christ alone (1 Cor. 3:10–11).

Distinctive Concepts

- The second coming of Christ has faded in significance, since the power and glory of heaven are experienced now (1:3; 2:4–7; cf. Rom. 8:18–25; 2 Cor. 4:7–18).

- Jews and gentiles are merged equally into a new humanity (2:14–16) as opposed to gentiles being provisionally grafted into the tree of Israel (Rom. 11:13–21).
- Marriage is highly esteemed (5:21–23) rather than being merely allowed for the sake of controlling lust (1 Cor. 7:8–9).
- The law is said to have been abolished by Christ (2:15) rather than being described as something that the coming of faith has not overthrown (Rom. 3:31).
- The reconciliation of Jews and gentiles is depicted as an accomplished reality (2:11–18) rather than as a future hope (Rom. 11:25–32).
- Salvation is a present reality (2:7–10) rather than a future hope (Rom. 5:9–10; 10:9, 13; 1 Cor. 3:15; 5:5; but cf. Rom. 8:24; 1 Cor. 1:18; 15:2; 2 Cor. 2:15).
- Exaltation of believers to heaven is a present reality (2:6) rather than a future hope (1 Cor. 15:23; 1 Thess. 4:16–17).

17.5

A Life Worthy of the Calling (Box 17.4)

Ephesians 4:1–6:18 offers these “dos and don’ts” with regard to Christian behavior.

Do

- be humble and gentle (4:2)
- be patient, bearing with one another in love (4:2)
- make every effort to maintain unity and peace (4:3)
- speak the truth in love to others in the body (4:15)
- speak truth, not falsehood, to neighbors (4:25)
- work honestly at manual labor (4:28)
- be sufficiently productive to share with the needy (4:28)
- speak only words that impart grace and edify others (4:29)
- be kind to one another (4:32)
- be tenderhearted, forgiving one another (4:32)
- be imitators of God (5:1)
- live in love, as Christ loved us (5:2)
- offer thanksgiving (5:4)
- try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord (5:10)
- expose the secret and shameful works of darkness (5:11–12)
- be careful to live wisely (5:15)

- make the most of the time (5:16)
- understand what the will of the Lord is (5:17)
- be filled with the Spirit (5:18)
- sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs (5:19)
- give thanks to God at all times and for everything (5:20)
- be subject to one another in reverence for Christ (5:21)
- be strong in the Lord and stand firm (6:10, 14)
- pray at all times (6:18)

Don't

- be tossed about by every wind of doctrine (4:14)
- fall prey to people's trickery, craftiness, or deceitful scheming (4:14)
- pursue licentiousness or impure practices (4:19–20)
- yield to lust (4:22)
- let the sun go down on your anger (4:26)
- make room for the devil (4:27)
- steal (4:28)
- let evil talk come out of your mouth (4:29)
- grieve the Holy Spirit of God (4:30)
- hold on to bitterness, wrath, anger, wrangling, slander, or malice (4:31)
- even mention fornication, impurity of any kind, or greed (5:3)

- make any allowance for obscene, silly, or vulgar talk (5:4)
- let anyone deceive you with empty words (5:6)
- associate with deceivers or the disobedient (5:7)
- take part in the unfruitful works of darkness (5:11)
- be foolish (5:17)
- get drunk with wine (5:18)

17.6

Ephesians 5:21–6:9 and Other Household Tables in the New Testament

The New Testament letters contains several *Haustafeln* (“household tables”), a literary form that was common in the Greco-Roman world. Here are three of the best-known examples. See also 1 Timothy 2:8–15; 5:1–2; 6:1–2; Titus 2:1–10. Also see two letters by early Christian leaders that are not found in the New Testament: *1 Clement* 1:3; 21:6–9; Polycarp, *To the Philippians* 4:1–6:2).

Ephesians 5:21–6:9

5:21 Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.
22 Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord.**23** For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior.
24 Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands.
25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, **26** in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, **27** so as to present the church to himself in splendor, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind—yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish. **28** In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. **29** For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, **30** because we are members of his body. **31** “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” **32** This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church.
33 Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband.
6:1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.
2 “Honor your father and mother”—this is the first commandment with a promise: **3** “so that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.”
4 And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.
5 Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as you obey Christ; **6** not only while being

watched, and in order to please them, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. **7** Render service with enthusiasm, as to the Lord and not to men and women, **8** knowing that whatever good we do, we will receive the same again from the Lord, whether we are slaves or free.

9 And, masters, do the same to them. Stop threatening them, for you know that both of you have the same Master in heaven, and with him there is no partiality.

Colossians 3:18–4:1

3:18 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

19 Husbands, love your wives and never treat them harshly.

20 Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is your acceptable duty in the Lord. **21** Fathers, do not provoke your children, or they may lose heart. **22** Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything, not only while being watched and in order to please them, but wholeheartedly, fearing the Lord.

23 Whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord and not for your masters, **24** since you know that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you serve the Lord Christ. **25** For the wrongdoer will be paid back for whatever wrong has been done, and there is no partiality. **4:1** Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, for you know that you also have a Master in heaven.

1 Peter 3:1–7

3:1 Wives, in the same way, accept the authority of your husbands, so that, even if some of them do not obey the word, they may be won over without a word by their wives' conduct, **2** when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. **3** Do not adorn yourselves outwardly by braiding your hair, and by wearing gold ornaments or fine clothing; **4** rather, let your adornment be the inner self with the lasting beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in God's sight. **5** It was in this way long ago that the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves by accepting the authority of their husbands. **6** Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham and called him lord. You have become her daughters as long as you do what is good and never let fears alarm you.

7 Husbands, in the same way, show consideration for your wives in your life together, paying honor to the woman as the weaker sex, since they too are also heirs of the gracious gift of life—so that nothing may hinder your prayers.

17.7

Artemis of the Ephesians

Artemis (pronounced ahr´tuh-mis) was a goddess widely worshiped in antiquity throughout the Hellenistic and Roman world. Although identified with the Greek Artemis (and the Roman Diana), the sister of Apollo, the Ephesian Artemis had little in common with those deities of classical mythology. She was more like the ancient Anatolian and Asian mother goddess known also as Cybele. Above all, she was a patroness of nature and fertility.

The worship of some sort of mother goddess in this region antedated the settlement of Greeks in the area (ca. 1000 BCE). Acts 19:35 refers to a “sacred stone that fell from the sky” (ESV), possibly a meteorite, which might have been connected with this ancient cult.

By New Testament times, the goddess of the Ephesians had assumed a distinctive image: the upper region of her body was covered with numerous breasts (or possibly eggs), and she wore a turret crown and a long skirt with bands of animals and birds in relief. She was often accompanied by dogs or stags on either side, probably due to the syncretism with the original Greek Artemis.

The earliest Greek shrine to Artemis consisted of two simple platforms, but around 600 BCE the Cretan architect Chersiphron constructed a massive and impressive temple, known throughout the world as the Artemision. It took approximately one hundred years to

complete; by 500 BCE it measured 375 by 180 feet and had 60-foot marble columns. Then in 356 BCE this glorious temple burned to the ground, somewhat ominously some would say, on the very night that Alexander the Great was born.

The architect Dinocrates soon began a new Artemision, which was completed around 250 BCE. Even more glorious than its predecessor, it was regarded at the time of Jesus as one of the “seven wonders of the world” (as was the Jewish temple in Jerusalem). Certainly the Artemision is what put Ephesus “on the map” for many Romans, and by the time Paul visited the city, it had stood for three hundred years as the symbol of Ephesian prosperity and national pride.

Paul’s letter to the Ephesians makes no mention of Artemis or of her temple, but the book of Acts tells of Paul preaching so effectively that many Ephesians feared interest in Artemis could wane. In particular, members of the guild of silversmiths (led by a certain Demetrius) were afraid that their trade of making silver shrines of Artemis would be jeopardized (19:23–27). Opinion varies concerning just what these shrines may have been, as nothing quite like this has been found.

The Artemision was destroyed by the Goths in 263 CE. Practically nothing of it remains today.

17.8

Acts 19:23–41—Temple of Artemis

The temple of Artemis sat on a platform 400 feet long and 240 feet wide. The building itself was larger than a modern football field: 360 feet long and 180 feet wide. It had more than 120 columns, each of which was over 55 feet tall and gilded with gold and silver. A peaked roof rested atop the columns.

The temple that existed in New Testament times was actually the third one on that site. It had been constructed in the late fourth century BCE, the work having begun in 323. Literary sources describe the temple as being richly adorned with paintings and sculptures by some of the most renowned artists of antiquity.

In the second century BCE, Antipater of Sidon compiled a list of the seven wonders of the world, including the Temple of Artemis among them. He offers this comment:

I have set eyes on the wall of lofty Babylon on which is a road for chariots, and the statue of Zeus by the Alpheus, and the hanging gardens, and the colossus of the Sun, and the huge labor of the high pyramids, and the vast tomb of Mausolus; but when I saw the house of Artemis that mounted to the clouds, those other marvels lost their brilliancy, and I said, “Lo, apart from Olympus, the Sun never looked on aught so grand.” (Greek Anthology 9.58)

The book of Acts reports that some Ephesians feared the temple could be endangered by the success of Christian evangelism:

About that time no little disturbance broke out concerning the Way. A man named Demetrius, a silversmith who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the artisans. These he gathered together, with the workers of the same trade, and said, "Men, you know that we get our wealth from this business. You also see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost the whole of Asia this Paul has persuaded and drawn away a considerable number of people by saying that gods made with hands are not gods. And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be scorned, and she will be deprived of her majesty that brought all Asia and the world to worship her."

When they heard this, they were enraged and shouted, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" The city was filled with the confusion; and people rushed together to the theater, dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul's travel companions. Paul wished to go into the crowd, but the disciples would not let him; even some officials of the province of Asia, who were friendly to him, sent him a message urging him not to venture into the theater. Meanwhile, some were shouting one thing, some another; for the assembly was in confusion, and most of them did not know why they had come together. Some of the crowd gave instructions to Alexander, whom the Jews had

pushed forward. And Alexander motioned for silence and tried to make a defense before the people. But when they recognized that he was a Jew, for about two hours all of them shouted in unison, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" But when the town clerk had quieted the crowd, he said, "Citizens of Ephesus, who is there that does not know that the city of the Ephesians is the temple keeper of the great Artemis and of the statue that fell from heaven? Since these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rash. You have brought these men here who are neither temple robbers nor blasphemers of our goddess. If therefore Demetrius and the artisans with him have a complaint against anyone, the courts are open, and there are proconsuls; let them bring charges there against one another. If there is anything further you want to know, it must be settled in the regular assembly. For we are in danger of being charged with rioting today, since there is no cause that we can give to justify this commotion." When he had said this, he dismissed the assembly. (Acts 19:23–41)

Acts of John, a second-century apocryphal book, includes a tale of the temple's destruction: the apostle John prayed publicly in the Temple of Artemis, exorcising its demons and "of a sudden the altar of Artemis split in many pieces . . . and half the temple fell down," instantly converting the Ephesians, who wept, prayed or took flight.¹ This, of course, did not actually happen: numerous sources describe the temple as intact for some time after the lifetime of John and other apostles.

In 262 CE, however, the Temple of Artemis was destroyed in a raid by the Goths, who set it aflame.

1. Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire AD 100–400* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1984), 26.

17.9

Ephesians 6:1–4—Parenting Advice from Paul and Ben Sira

The letters to Ephesians and Colossians offer the apostle Paul’s advice to children and fathers regarding discipline and obedience. This counsel makes for interesting comparison with the much longer advice offered to fathers by the second-century-BCE teacher Ben Sira, whose words are presented in the deuterocanonical book of Sirach (part of what Protestant Christians call the Apocrypha).

Ephesians 6:1–4	Colossians 3:20–21	Sirach 30:1–13
<p>Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother”—this is the first commandment with a promise: “so that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.”</p> <p>And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.</p>	<p>Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is your acceptable duty in the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, or they may lose heart.</p>	<p>He who loves his son will whip him often, so that he may rejoice at the way he turns out.</p> <p>He who disciplines his son will profit by him, and will boast of him among acquaintances.</p> <p>He who teaches his son will make his enemies envious, and will glory in him among his friends.</p> <p>When the father dies he will not seem to be dead, for he has left behind him one like himself, whom in his life he looked upon with joy and at death, without grief.</p> <p>He has left behind him an avenger against his enemies, and one to repay the kindness of his friends.</p> <p>Whoever spoils his son will bind up his wounds, and will suffer heartache at every cry.</p> <p>An unbroken horse turns out stubborn, and an unchecked son turns out</p>

		<p>headstrong. Pamper a child, and he will terrorize you; play with him, and he will grieve you. Do not laugh with him, or you will have sorrow with him, and in the end you will gnash your teeth. Give him no freedom in his youth, and do not ignore his errors. Bow down his neck in his youth, and beat his sides while he is young, or else he will become stubborn and disobey you, and you will have sorrow of soul from him. Discipline your son and make his yoke heavy, so that you may not be offended by his shamelessness.</p>
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17.10

Justification for *Haustafeln* in the Ten Commandments (Philo)

Philo of Alexandria (ca. 25 BCE–ca. 50 CE) was a Hellenistic Jewish writer contemporaneous with Jesus. In one of his documents, he explains that the modern household codes so popular in the Roman world find support in the Jewish Scriptures, since they can be viewed as spelling out the implications of the fourth commandment¹ (“Honor your father and your mother”):

In the fifth commandment on honouring parents we have a suggestion of many necessary laws drawn up to deal with the relations of old to young, rulers to subjects, benefactors to benefited, slaves to masters.

For parents belong to the superior class of the above-mentioned pairs, that which comprises seniors, rulers, benefactors and masters, while children occupy the lower position with juniors, subjects, receivers of benefits and slaves. And there are many other instructions given, to the young on courtesy to the old, to the old on taking care of the young, to subjects on obeying their rulers, to rulers on promoting the welfare of their subjects, to recipients of benefits on requiting them with gratitude, to those who have given of their own initiative on not seeking to get repayment as though it were a debt, to servants on rendering an

affectionate loyalty to their masters, to masters on showing the gentleness and kindness by which inequality is equalized.²

1. “Honor your father and mother” is the fourth commandment according to traditional numbering used in Jewish, Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Lutheran communities. Other Protestant traditions often follow a different system of numbering developed by John Calvin. According to that system, “Honor your father and mother” would be the fifth commandment.

2. Philo, “On the Decalogue (*De Decalogo*),” trans. F. H. Colson. Loeb Classical Library, vol. 7 (London: Harvard University Press, 1998), 98.

17.11

Powerful Spiritual Beings (Box 17.3)

The cosmic dimension of Christ's victory over powerful spiritual beings is emphasized in Ephesians (see 1:20–21; 3:10) and also in Colossians (see 1:13; 2:10, 15). We read about:

- rulers (Eph. 1:21; 2:2; 3:10; 6:12; Col. 1:16; 2:10, 15; cf. Rom. 8:38; 1 Cor. 15:24)
- authorities (Eph. 1:21; 3:10; 6:12; Col. 1:13, 16; 2:10, 15; cf. 1 Cor. 15:24)
- powers (Eph. 1:21; cf. Rom. 8:38; 1 Cor. 15:24)
- cosmic powers (Eph. 6:12)
- dominions (Eph. 1:21; Col. 1:16)
- thrones (Col. 1:16)

Six different designations are used in Greek, though English Bibles do not translate the words consistently; the phrase “elemental spirits of the universe” (Col. 2:8, 20) seems generic.

Who or what are these spiritual beings? The author and original readers of Ephesians would have believed that they were living creatures, not biological entities “of blood and flesh” (Eph. 6:12), but just as real as humans or animals. Angels and demons may be the best-known examples of such beings, along with the devil, who is called “the ruler of the power of the air” (2:2) and elsewhere in the New Testament is referred to as “the god of this world” (2 Cor. 4:4).

Jews and Christians often identified the gods of other religions as powerful spiritual beings as well, not denying their existence but rather identifying them as inferior rivals to the one true God.

In Ephesians these powerful spiritual beings are presented as evil forces intent on dominating people's lives and influencing world affairs. They are the true enemies of believers (6:12). Ephesians says that Christ has been elevated to a position of dominance over them (1:20–21), that the church shares in this exaltation (1:22–23; 2:6; 3:10), and that God equips believers for the ongoing struggle against such spiritual forces of evil in “this present darkness” (6:12).

17.12

Authorship of Ephesians

At least three scenarios for authorship of Ephesians are possible, and all three have attracted considerable support from interpreters in the modern era.

Ephesians Was Written by the Apostle Paul

A common proposal is that Paul wrote the letter to the Colossians to deal with specific issues in that congregation, and then, while those thoughts were still fresh in his mind, he composed a more general letter to be taken to various churches in Asia Minor, perhaps sending the original to the favored church of Ephesus and entrusting them with the responsibility of copying and disseminating it for him. A rough analogy to such a process might be found in the letters of Galatians and Romans, the first written to deal with a particular situation, and the second covering much of the same ground in more general terms.

Scholars who favor this scenario usually play down the significance of the letter's distinctive features and explain them in light of context and circumstances. Paul may have used an amanuensis or secretary to compose the letter, and the fact that he was in prison (literally in chains? [see 6:20]) may have meant that he had to grant that person more latitude with regard to the actual wording than he would have done under ideal circumstances. Furthermore, the letter

reflects Paul's mature thinking, presenting more settled reflection than is evident in letters that were composed in response to immediate crises in his congregations. Its distinctive perspectives do not have to be viewed as contradictory to what is in the other letters; they may be considered representative endpoints for the trajectories of thought that are evident elsewhere.

Ephesians Was Written by One of Paul's Disciples after His Death

According to this view, the author was someone who wanted to express what the apostle Paul would have said were he still around. One version of this theory holds that *Ephesians* is simply a posthumous publication, composed soon after Paul's execution as the letter that Paul had intended to write and presenting (in the language of one of his disciples) what had been on the apostle's mind in his final days. Another version of this theory allows that *Ephesians* may have been written some years later (in the 70s or 80s) by someone who felt authorized to speak for Paul and who thought that writing in his name was an appropriate way to honor him and keep the Pauline tradition alive.

In any case, if the letter was in fact produced by one of Paul's disciples, who might that person have been? Timothy is listed as a coauthor for *Colossians*, so his name comes to mind. Other suggestions are more creative: Onesimus, the runaway slave whom Paul sent back to Philemon and who, according to some traditions,

later became a bishop in Ephesus (see chap. 23, “Historical Background” in the printed book); Luke the physician, who may be the author of the Gospel and Acts, and who is said to have been with Paul during his Roman imprisonment (Col. 4:14; Philem. 24); or Tychicus, the presumed bearer of the letter, who is then thought to have copied what Paul said about him in Colossians (4:7) and placed it at the end of Ephesians (6:21) as something of a secret signature.

This is all speculation, of course, and scholars who hold to this theory of authorship usually are content to ascribe Ephesians to “Paul’s best disciple,” by which they mean one who possessed the brilliance and eloquence to produce a theological masterpiece, along with the humility to give his departed teacher the credit for it. Those who hold this view maintain that it accounts both for the basic continuity with Pauline thought that is evident in Ephesians and for those elements that they do not believe can be attributed to the apostle: what we have in Ephesians is the ideas of Paul filtered through the mind of an extraordinarily gifted apprentice.

Ephesians Was Written by a Later Admirer of Paul Who Had Not Actually Known Him

A third position allows that Ephesians was written by someone who wanted to use Paul’s revered name to promote his own ideas (and who, no doubt, thought that he was honoring the apostle by giving him credit for those ideas and so continuing his legacy). Scholars

who hold to this view often claim that Ephesians has much in common with the works of church leaders who wrote in the second century. Its elevation of the church, in particular, marks a transition from the Christianity of Paul's day to what may be termed "early catholicism." The assumption is that the person or group responsible for Ephesians was familiar with Colossians and accentuated the movement toward high ecclesiology that was already evident in that writing; in copying the style and format of that letter, the author of Ephesians for some reason failed to reproduce the greetings and other personal elements that would have made Ephesians look more like a typical Pauline production.

Nevertheless, the letter managed to gain acceptance almost immediately as a genuine letter of Paul; such acceptance may have been facilitated by its intrinsic appeal (as beautiful and elegant), by its superficial contact with Pauline terminology, and by its elevation of ecclesiastical authorities (2:20; 3:5; 4:11), who, after all, were in the position to make judgments on whether a work was genuine. Scholars who hold to this view tend to read Ephesians as expressive of a decidedly post-Pauline perspective that reveals how Christians of a later generation had developed some of his ideas in directions that he himself may not have taken.

Conclusion

These different views regarding the authorship of Ephesians lead to different ways of interpreting the letter. As one scholar has noted,

Ephesians is variously read as “the mature fruit of Paul’s thought,” “an inspired re-interpretation of Paul’s thought,” or “the beginning distortion of Paul’s thought”¹

1. See Nils Dahl, “Ephesians,” in *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible: Supplementary Volume*, ed. Keith Crim (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), 268.

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17.13

Literary Siblings: Relationship of Ephesians to Colossians

Ephesians is remarkably similar to the letter of Paul to the Colossians:

- Somewhere between one-half and one-third of the 155 verses in Ephesians have close parallels to the material found in Colossians.
- In many cases, these parallels occur in the same order of presentation.
- A few passages are very close in wording (cf. Eph. 1:4 with Col. 1:22; Eph. 1:15 with Col. 1:4; Eph. 6:21–22 with Col. 4:7–8).

Most scholars believe that Colossians was written first and that whoever wrote Ephesians was familiar with the contents of that letter. This seems to make sense, because Ephesians has the more generic tone, presenting general reflection on points that, in Colossians, are made with reference to a specific situation.

This allows for a number of possibilities:

- Paul wrote Colossians as a specific letter to a particular church, and then he wrote Ephesians as a more general letter dealing with the same subject matter.

- Paul wrote Colossians, and later someone else used Colossians as a template to create Ephesians as a pseudepigraphical letter written in Paul's name.
- Paul wrote neither Colossians nor Ephesians; some pseudonymous author wrote both letters.
- One pseudonymous author wrote Colossians, and later a different pseudonymous author used Colossians as a template to create Ephesians.

17.14

The Christian Household (Box 17.5)

Ephesians 5:21–6:9 presents a modified *Haustafel*, or table of household duties, appropriate for Christians, who also belong to the household of God (2:19). Such tables were common in Greco-Roman writings, but this one is distinctive in that it includes directives to the more powerful members of the household: the instructions are for not just wives but also husbands, not just children but also fathers, not just slaves but also masters.

These directives seem antiquated and oppressive to many modern readers, who believe that wives are to be equal partners in a marriage, not subjects of the husband's domain; children should be taught respect rather than blind obedience; slaves should be emancipated, not intimidated into obedience.

The early Christians were not so radical as to deny the basic ranking of responsibilities that society assigned to such relationships (but see Gal. 3:28). Nevertheless, the traditional *Haustafel* is set here within a context of *mutual* submission (Eph. 5:21), and the overall focus is shifted toward responsibilities of the more powerful party—this in keeping with the servant ethic encouraged by Jesus in the Gospels (Mark 10:41–45; John 13:1–7). Most notable, perhaps, is the notion that husbands are to love their wives in the same way that Christ loved the church: they are to put their wives' wants and needs

ahead of their own, giving of themselves in selfless service. This call to husbands probably is based on a social distinction rather than on gender characteristics: the main point is that the impact of Christ's universal call to self-denial is proportionately related to status and power (cf. Mark 8:34).

Other examples of *Haustafeln* are found in Colossians 3:18–4:1; 1 Timothy 2:8–15; 5:1–2; 6:1–2; Titus 2:1–10; 1 Peter 2:13–3:7 (see also two letters by other early church leaders: *1 Clement* 1:3; 21:6–9; Polycarp, *To the Philippians* 4:1–6:2).

18.0

Philippians: Outline of Contents

- I. Epistolary salutation (1:1–2)
- II. Introduction, or exordium (1:3–11)
- III. Paul’s narrative of the situation (1:12–26)
- IV. Paul’s main point, or proposition (1:27–30)
- V. Supporting proofs to strengthen the proposition (2:1–4:3)
 - A. The example of Christ and its impact (2:1–18)
 - B. The example of Timothy and Epaphroditus (2:19–30)
 - C. The example of Paul (3:1–4:1)
 - D. The counterexample of Euodia and Syntyche (4:2–3)
- VI. The summing up, or peroration (4:4–20)
 - A. The general summary (4:4–9)
 - B. Paul as an exemplar (4:10–20)
- VII. Epistolary closing (4:21–23).

Courtesy of *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, ed. Mark Allan Powell (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 796.

18.1

Philippians in the Revised Common Lectionary

Text	Series	Liturgical Occasion	Calendar Date
1:3–11	C	Advent 2	3 Sundays before Dec. 25
1:21–30	A	Lectionary 25	Sept. 18–24
2:1–13	A	Lectionary 26	Sept. 25–Oct. 1
2:5–11	A, B, C	Passion Sunday	1 Sunday before Easter
3:4b–14	C	Lent 5	2 Sundays before Easter
3:4b–14	A	Lectionary 27	Oct. 2–8
3:17–4:1	C	Lent 2	5 Sundays before Easter
4:1–9	A	Lectionary 28	Oct. 9–15
4:4–7	C	Advent 3	2 Sundays before Dec. 25

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18.3

The Christ Hymn (Box 18.4)

The most celebrated passage in Paul's letter to the Philippians is 2:6–11, often called the "Christ Hymn." Its poetic quality marks it as material that probably was used in early Christian worship as a creed or responsive reading or, indeed, as an actual hymn that was put to music and sung or chanted. Paul might have composed the piece himself, or he might be quoting material familiar to the Philippians from their liturgy.

Here is one of several ways in which the text might be arranged in verses that resemble a modern hymn:

Though he was in the form of God
He did not regard equality with God
As something to be exploited
But emptied himself
Taking the form of a slave
Being born in human likeness
And being found in human form
He humbled himself
And became obedient unto death—
even death on a cross!
Therefore God also highly exalted him
And gave him the name
That is above every name

So that at the name of Jesus
Every knee should bend
In heaven and on earth and under the earth
And every tongue should confess
That Jesus Christ is Lord
To the glory of God the Father.

The focus of the hymn is on Christ Jesus (2:6), but it celebrates his career with allusions to the Old Testament. The voluntary humiliation of Christ in the first part draws on Isaiah 52:13–53:12, and the universal submission to him at the end quotes from Isaiah 45:23 (cf. Rom. 14:11). Also, Christ’s willingness to give up his “equality with God” may be seen as a contrast to Adam’s desire to attain equality with God in Genesis 3:1–7 (cf. Rom. 5:12–19).

Around 110, Pliny the Younger, a Roman governor, wrote a letter to the emperor Trajan to inform him of Christians. He said that when Christians gather at their meetings, they “chant verses alternately amongst themselves in honor of Christ as if to a God” (*Epistulae* 10.96). The “Christ Hymn” of Philippians 2:6–11 seems like a perfect example of the sort of liturgical material that this Roman governor heard the Christians using.

18.4

Euodia and Syntyche (Box 18.7)

Near the close of his letter to the Philippians, Paul urges two women, Euodia and Syntyche, to “be of the same mind in the Lord,” and he appeals to someone else in the church (his “loyal companion”) to help them (4:2–3). The women are coworkers of Paul, and apparently they have had a falling out. This could be a personal matter—a spat that requires an impartial mediator to help facilitate conflict resolution. Or, since the women appear to be prominent in the church (4:3), they could be leaders of major factions with different ideas on congregational policies and programs. Their inability to see eye to eye could pose a threat to the unity of the church as a whole.

Some interpreters think that the rift between Euodia and Syntyche might be a primary reason for Paul’s attention to the themes of unity and humility throughout the letter. Although he does not address the two women by name until the end, other verses perhaps are quietly addressed to them and to their followers as well (see 1:27; 2:1–5, 14–15; 3:15–16).

18.5

Paul in Prison

What was prison like in the days of Paul? The purpose of imprisonment in the Roman world was neither reform nor punishment; it was simply a way to confine those awaiting judgment. Prisoners were held prior to trial; once a verdict was rendered, they might be executed, beaten, or sent into exile, but normally they would not be sentenced to more time in captivity.

In terms of physical accommodations, most prison cells were basically dungeons—dark, dank facilities where people could be kept captive, often in chains, until the authorities were ready to deal with them. Sometimes, however, respectable individuals could be held under a form of “house arrest,” guarded by soldiers but allowed a relative measure of comfort and freedom. According to the book of Acts, Paul experienced both the best (28:16, 30–31) and the worst (16:23–24) of these possible forms of captivity at different points in his career (cf. 2 Cor. 11:23).

In Philippians, Paul says that he is “in chains” (1:7, 13, 14, 17; the Greek word *desmos*, translated “imprisonment” in many English Bibles, actually means “chain”). Is he literally in chains, or does he mean that in a metaphorical sense? Many interpreters think that his ability to converse with his colleagues, receive gifts, and dictate this letter implies something closer to house arrest. Whatever the

conditions, imprisonment always brought social disgrace, casting aspersions on the prisoner's reputation and generating a significant loss of honor. Paul tries to turn this factor to his own ironic advantage: he will not be put to shame if his own humiliation results in the exaltation of Christ (1:20).

The New Testament contains four other letters that indicate they were written by Paul from prison: Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, and 2 Timothy. Together with Philippians, the five books are sometimes called the "captivity epistles" or the "prison letters."

18.6

Prison Conditions in the Roman World

Types of Imprisonment

Although Ezra 7:26 lists imprisonment as one of several recognized forms of legal punishment, there are no clear references to imprisonment being imposed as a legal penalty in the New Testament. This is in keeping with Roman policies, which did not view the purpose of imprisonment as reform or punishment; imprisonment was simply a means to hold on to those awaiting judgment. Prisoners were held *before* trial; once a verdict was rendered, they might be executed, beaten, or sent into exile, but they would not normally be sentenced to more time in prison.

The New Testament does offer many examples of such pretrial imprisonment: Acts 4:3; 12:3–4; 16:23–24; 23:35; Philippians 1:7–26. The binding or chaining of Jesus before he was brought to Pilate may also reflect some sort of formal arrest procedures (Matt. 27:2; Mark 15:1). Paul's imprisoning of Christians (Acts 8:3) probably refers to his handing them over to the custody of synagogue authorities who would then administer the penalty provided for in Israel's law: a flogging of up to forty lashes (Deut. 25:1–3; 2 Cor. 11:24; Acts 22:19). Pretrial retention, however, could be easily abused and become, in effect, a means of punishment. This appears to have been the case with John the Baptist, for whom no trial was

scheduled (Mark 6:17–20), and with Paul, who was held without trial for two years in Caesarea (allegedly because the governor wanted a bribe to release him, or wanted to appease the Jews whom Paul had offended, see Acts 24:26–27). Debtors unable to pay their creditors were also imprisoned, sometimes in special debtors' prisons, until their debts were paid. Luke 12:58–59 makes precise reference to the “officers” who in Roman times had charge of such prisons (see also Matt. 5:25; 18:30).

Prison Conditions

Conditions in ancient prisons were often harsh. Most prisoners wore chains; their feet might be shackled, their hands manacled or even attached to their neck by another chain, and their movements further restricted by a chain fastened to a post. The existence of laws prohibiting chains that were too short or too restrictive indicates that such practices were employed often enough to merit regulation. The very word “chains” became a synonym for imprisonment. Some prisoners were also kept in wooden stocks, devices to restrain the feet, hands, or even the neck of an individual (see Acts 16:24).

Prisons were often very dark (see Isa. 42:7); the inner area of the prison mentioned in Acts 16:24 was probably without windows.

Although solitary confinement was known, prisoners generally were kept grouped together, accused and condemned, men and women alike. Overcrowding was not infrequent (Isa. 24:22). Prisons often had poor air circulation, a lack of hygienic facilities, rats and vermin,

and food of poor quality. Unscrupulous guards might at times use the withholding of food or even outright torture to extort money from prisoners or their relatives.

Although various rulers, especially in Roman imperial times, struggled to enact reforms to prevent the most severe abuses, the quality of prison life largely remained the responsibility of local officials, and conditions varied considerably from place to place. Somewhat ominously, Hebrews 13:3 speaks of “those who are in prison” in parallel with “those who are being tortured”; the two groups are apparently assumed to be the same.

Respectable individuals were sometimes accorded a form of “house arrest,” guarded by soldiers but allowed a relative measure of comfort and freedom. They could, for example, receive visitors and transact business while waiting for their case to come to court or be resolved. According to the book of Acts, something of this nature was the situation Paul experienced in Rome (28:16, 30–31). Paul, however, indicates in 2 Corinthians 11:23 that he has been imprisoned multiple times (cf. 2 Cor. 6:5), and that letter was written prior to his imprisonments in Jerusalem, Caesarea, and Rome, as reported in Acts 22–28. The exact circumstances or longevity of those imprisonments are difficult to determine. In Philippians 1:7, 13, Paul says that he is “in chains” (NRSV, “imprisonment”) but it is not known whether he means that literally or in a metaphorical sense (as

the NRSV assumes). Elsewhere, 2 Timothy 2:9 presents Paul as complaining that he has been “chained like a criminal.”

Whatever the conditions, imprisonment always brought social disgrace, casting aspersions on the person’s reputation and generating a significant loss of honor. This is clearly reflected in 2 Timothy 1:16, where Onesiphorus is singled out for praise as one who was not ashamed of Paul’s chain. In Philippians, Paul tries to turn the humiliation factor to his own ironic advantage: he will not truly be put to shame if his personal humiliation results in the exaltation of Christ (1:20). Likewise, 2 Timothy 2:9 affirms that, even if Paul is chained, the word of God is not.

All told, five New Testament letters are said to have been written from prison: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 2 Timothy, and Philemon. All of these are attributed to Paul; they are sometimes called the “captivity letters” and treated as a group.

18.7

Friendship and Sharing (Box 18.6)

The proverb says, “the possessions of friends are shared”—and it says this correctly, for friendship consists in sharing, and siblings and comrades hold all things in common. (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 8.9.1–2)¹

All who believed were together and had all things in common.
(Acts 2:44).

1. Quoted in Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament*, 5th ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 341.

18.8

Hymns in New Testament Letters (Box 18.2)

The New Testament often mentions Christians singing hymns and spiritual songs (Acts 16:25; 1 Cor. 14:15, 26; Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19; Heb. 2:12; James 5:13). Still, it does not contain a songbook or hymnal comparable to the book of Psalms in the Old Testament. Instead we find liturgical materials woven into other books. Notable examples are found in the Gospel of Luke (1:46–55, 67–79; 2:14, 29–32) and the book of Revelation (1:5–6; 4:8, 11; 5:9–14; 7:10–12, 15–17; 11:15–18; 12:10–12; 15:3–4; 16:5–7; 19:1–8; 22:13). Some of the letters attributed to Paul also appear to draw on hymns from the early church. Here are some often-cited examples:

- Rom. 11:33–36: a doxology on the inscrutability of God
- 1 Cor. 13: an exposition on the superiority of love
- Eph. 1:3–14: a doxology on the redemptive work of God in Christ
- Eph. 5:14: a verse promising the life and light of Christ to believers
- Phil. 2:6–11: a doxology on the self-abasement and the ensuing exaltation of Christ
- Col. 1:15–20: an exposition on the person of Christ and God's work through him

- 1 Tim. 3:16: a short litany on the coming of Christ to earth and his return to heaven
- 2 Tim. 2:11–13: a promise that suffering for Christ leads to glory

18.9

How Many Letters to Philippi?

Polycarp, a second-century bishop, mentions letters of Paul to the Philippians. Did Paul write more than one letter to this church? Some scholars believe that the letter to the Philippians in our Bibles is actually a composite of two or three letters that Paul wrote at different times.

- 3:1a; 4:8–9, 21–23 sound like possible conclusions to letters
- 3:1b–4:3 has a different tone than the rest of the letter (warnings against enemies in a letter that is otherwise happy and confident)
- 4:10–20 expresses thanksgiving for a gift, which typically came at the beginning of a letter rather than at the end
- 2:25–30 speaks of Epaphroditus returning to Philippi after a protracted illness, but 4:18 refers to him as if he has just arrived

A “two-letter theory” suggests that Paul wrote one letter (3:1b–4:20) when Epaphroditus first arrived and another letter (1:1–3:1a; 4:21–23) after Epaphroditus recovered from sickness. A “three-letter theory” suggests that Paul wrote an early thank-you note (4:10–20), a follow-up letter that was hopeful and confident (1:1–3:1a; 4:4–7, 21–23), and a third letter to address problems in the church (3:1b–

4:3; 4:8–9). In either case, a later editor is supposed to have woven the different letters together to form the one that we now have in our Bibles.

There is no solid evidence to support these proposals, but many scholars think that *Philippians* makes better sense when its contents are reorganized into two or three different compositions. Others find such theories an unnecessary imposition; they assume that Paul dictated the letter over a period of time in a way that allows shifts in his thought and mood.

18.10

Trouble in Philippi (Box 18.3)

Paul's letter to the Philippians is not particularly polemical, but references to opponents or enemies do appear here and there.

Text	Comment	Possible Reference
1:15–18	Some proclaim Christ out of false motives: envy, rivalry, and selfish ambition.	Christian missionaries who compete with Paul and create factions in the church (cf. 1 Cor. 1:11–13)
1:28–30	Opponents cause the Philippians to suffer the same struggles that Paul experienced as a missionary in the city.	Nonbelievers who persecute Christians (cf. Acts 16:19–39; 2 Cor. 1:8–9; 6:4–5; 11:23–26)
3:2	Evil workers (whom Paul calls “dogs”) insist on “mutilating the flesh.”	Jewish Christians who say that all Christians must be circumcised (cf. Gal. 5:2–12)
3:18–19	Many live as “enemies of the cross,” having their belly as their god, glorying in their shame, and setting their minds on earthly things.	Christians who seek power and glory apart from suffering and service (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18–2:5; 2 Cor. 10–12)

Note that only the second reference (1:28–30) is to troublemakers who are definitely in Philippi. The first reference (1:15–18) is to people in the area where Paul is in prison. The last two references could be to troublemakers who are in Philippi, but it is possible that Paul is simply warning the Philippians about the kinds of people who have caused trouble elsewhere: the Judaizers in Galatia (see “Historical Background” in chap. 16) and the “super-apostles” in Corinth (see “Historical Background” in chap. 15).

18.11

Bishops and Deacons (Box 18.1)

Paul mentions “bishops and deacons” in his opening salutation to the Philippians (1:1). Much more is said elsewhere in the New Testament about the qualifications and responsibilities of persons holding such church offices (1 Tim. 3:1–13; Titus 1:7–9). We do not know, however, whether the terms meant the same thing in every locale. The word “bishop” (in Greek, *episkopos*) means “overseer,” and the word “deacon” (in Greek, *diakonos*) means “one who serves.” At the time Paul wrote to the Philippians, these words may have been fairly generic designations for church leaders rather than technical terms for particular orders of clergy.

18.12

Rubbish and Christ (Box 18.5)

In Philippians 3 Paul warns the believers against people who insist that circumcision is necessary to belong to God (3:2). This is an issue that he dealt with at length elsewhere (see Gal. 5:2–12). Now he insists, ironically, that it is those who trust in Christ who have become “the circumcision”—that is, the true people of God (Phil. 3:3). To drive the point home, Paul turns to autobiography, contrasting his identification with God as an exemplary (blameless!) Jew and the identification with God that he now enjoys through knowing Christ Jesus as his Lord (3:4–7). He does not mean to disparage the former, but he does allow that, as wonderful as his Jewish legacy might be, it is mere rubbish (literally, “dung”) compared to what is available through Christ (3:8). In a few verses, Paul sketches what has been called the essence of his theology: through faith in Jesus Christ, one may be justified (3:9), sanctified (3:10), and glorified (3:11). His words in these verses ring with the dialectic of what is “already” and what is “not yet”—a hallmark of his theological position. His advice to the Philippians emerges from that dialectic: “hold fast to what we have attained” (3:16) and “press on toward the goal” that lies ahead (3:14).

19.0

Colossians: Outline of Contents

- I. Epistolary salutation (1:1–2)
- II. Thanksgiving for the Colossians' past and present fidelity (1:3–8)
- III. The need for continued fidelity to the gospel (1:9–4:6)
 - A. The true way of salvation (1:9–3:4)
 - 1. The author's basic thesis (1:9–12)
 - 2. Supporting reason: God in Christ has accomplished a complete deliverance (1:13–20)
 - 3. Reiteration of the thesis (1:21–23)
 - 4. Supporting reason: Paul's fidelity in proclaiming the gospel (1:24–2:3)
 - 5. Counterexample: the infidelity of the new teachers (2:4–23)
 - 6. Reiteration of the thesis (3:1–4)
 - B. The ethical practices that follow from this (3:5–4:6)
- IV. Concluding greetings and instructions (4:7–18)

Courtesy of *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, ed. Mark Allan Powell (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 142.

19.1

Colossians in the Revised Common Lectionary

Text	Series	Liturgical Occasion	Calendar Date
1:1–14	C	Lectionary 15	Jul 10–16
1:11–20	C	Christ the King	Nov 20–26
1:15–28	C	Lectionary 16	Jul 17–23
2:6–15 (16–19)	C	Lectionary 17	Jul 24–30
3:1–4	A	Easter Day	Easter
3:1–11	C	Lectionary 18	Jul 31–Aug 6
3:12–17	C	Christmas 1	1 Sunday after Dec 25

19.2

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19.3

Parallels between Ephesians and Colossians (Box

17.1)

Similar topics are treated, often in the same order and sometimes with identical wording.

Topic	Ephesians	Colossians
Redemption and forgiveness	1:7	1:14–20
All things in heaven and earth are in Christ	1:10	1:20
I have heard of your faith	1:15	1:4
I thank God always for you	1:16	1:3
Pray that God will give you wisdom	1:17	1:9
Riches of a glorious inheritance/mystery	1:18	1:27
God made you alive	2:5	2:13
Aliens reconciled through Christ's death	2:12–13	1:21–22
Christ has abolished the law	2:15	2:14
Paul is suffering for their sake	3:1	1:24
Divine commission given to Paul	3:2	1:25
Divine mystery made known to Paul	3:3	1:26
Paul a servant of the gospel	3:7	1:23, 25
Lead a worthy life	4:1	1:10
Humility, meekness, patience	4:2	3:12
Bear with one another	4:2	3:13
Christ is head of the body	4:15–16	2:19
Put off old nature, put on new nature	4:22–32	3:5–10, 12
Let there be no immorality among you	5:3–6	3:5–9
Walk wisely and make the most of your time	5:15	4:5
Sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs	5:19	3:16
Give thanks to God	5:20	3:17
Tables of household duties	5:21–6:9	3:18–4:1
for wives	5:22–24	3:18
for husbands	5:25–33	3:19
for children	6:1–3	3:20
for fathers	6:4	3:21

for slaves	6:5–8	3:22–25
for masters	6:9	4:1
Paul the prisoner exhorts persistence in prayer	6:18–20	4:2–3
Tychicus will inform church about Paul	6:21	4:7
Tychicus sent to encourage their hearts	6:22	4:8

Indebted to Charles B. Puskas Jr., *The Letters of Paul: An Introduction* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993), 130–31.

19.4

Colossians and Philemon (Box 19.3)

Similarities

- Both Colossians and Philemon are said to be written from prison (Col. 4:3, 18; cf. 1:24; Philem. 9–10, 13).
- Both are said to be coauthored by Paul and Timothy (Col. 1:1; Philem. 1).
- Both letters mention many of the same individuals: Archippus (Col. 4:17; Philem. 2), Onesimus (Col. 4:9; Philem. 10), Epaphras (Col. 1:7; 4:12–13; Philem. 23), Mark (Col. 4:10; Philem. 24), Aristarchus (Col. 4:10; Philem. 24), Demas (Col. 4:14; Philem. 24), and Luke (Col. 4:14; Philem. 24).

Differences

- Philemon indicates that Epaphras is in prison with Paul, and Aristarchus is not (23–24); Colossians gives the impression that it is the other way around (4:10, 12).
- Colossians makes no mention of an impending visit from Paul, while Philemon indicates that Paul hopes to come to visit soon (22).

19.5

Colossians 3:18–4:1 and Other Household Tables in the New Testament

The New Testament letters contains several *Haustafeln* (“household tables”), a literary form that was common in the Greco-Roman world. Here are three of the best-known examples. See also 1 Timothy 2:8–15; 5:1–2; 6:1–2; Titus 2:1–10. Also see two letters by early Christian leaders that are not found in the New Testament: *1 Clement* 1:3; 21:6–9; Polycarp, *To the Philippians* 4:1–6:2).

Ephesians 5:21–6:9

5:21 Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.

22 Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord.

23 For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior. **24** Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands.

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, **26** in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, **27** so as to present the church to himself in splendor, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind—yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish. **28** In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. **29** For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, **30** because we are members of his body. **31** “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” **32** This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church. **33** Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband.

6:1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

2 “Honor your father and mother”—this is the first commandment with a promise: **3** “so that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.”

4 And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

5 Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, in

singleness of heart, as you obey Christ; **6** not only while being watched, and in order to please them, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. **7** Render service with enthusiasm, as to the Lord and not to men and women, **8** knowing that whatever good we do, we will receive the same again from the Lord, whether we are slaves or free.

9 And, masters, do the same to them. Stop threatening them, for you know that both of you have the same Master in heaven, and with him there is no partiality.

Colossians 3:18–4:1

3:18 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. **19** Husbands, love your wives and never treat them harshly.

20 Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is your acceptable duty in the Lord. **21** Fathers, do not provoke your children, or they may lose heart. **22** Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything, not only while being watched and in order to please them, but wholeheartedly, fearing the Lord.

23 Whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord and not for your masters, **24** since you know that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you serve the Lord Christ. **25** For the wrongdoer will be paid back for whatever wrong has been done, and there is no partiality. **4:1** Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, for you know that you also have a Master in heaven.

1 Peter 3:1–7

3:1 Wives, in the same way, accept the authority of your husbands, so that, even if some of them do not obey the word, they may be won over without a word by their wives' conduct, **2** when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. **3** Do not adorn yourselves outwardly by braiding your hair, and by wearing gold ornaments or fine clothing; **4** rather, let your adornment be the inner self with the lasting beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in God's sight. **5** It was in this way long ago that the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves by accepting the authority of their husbands. **6** Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham and called him lord. You have become her daughters as long as you do what is good and never let fears alarm you.

7 Husbands, in the same way, show consideration for your wives in your life together, paying honor to the woman as the weaker sex, since they too are also heirs of the gracious gift of life—so that nothing may hinder your prayers.

19.6

Archippus the Procrastinator (Box 19.8)

It has become a bit of a puzzle and source for jokes in New Testament studies: What was Archippus's unfinished task?

Archippus appears to have been a family member of Philemon who lived in or near Colossae. Paul calls him a "fellow soldier" in his personal letter to Philemon (v. 2). In Colossians, he is the only member of the community to be mentioned by name, and this is only because he is to receive a private message from Paul: "Say to Archippus, 'See that you complete the task you received in the Lord'" (4:17).

Is this simple encouragement or a discreet rebuke? Has Archippus been slow to fulfill some duty? This was, and remains, a private matter, but interpreters throughout the ages have taken the word to Archippus as a directive for all procrastinators.

19.7

Hymns in New Testament Letters (Box 18.2)

The New Testament often mentions Christians singing hymns and spiritual songs (Acts 16:25; 1 Cor. 14:15, 26; Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19; Heb. 2:12; James 5:13). Still, it does not contain a songbook or hymnal comparable to the book of Psalms in the Old Testament. Instead we find liturgical materials woven into other books. Notable examples are found in the Gospel of Luke (1:46–55, 67–79; 2:14, 29–32) and the book of Revelation (1:5–6; 4:8, 11; 5:9–14; 7:10–12, 15–17; 11:15–18; 12:10–12; 15:3–4; 16:5–7; 19:1–8; 22:13). Some of the letters attributed to Paul also appear to draw on hymns from the early church. Here are some often-cited examples:

- Rom. 11:33–36: a doxology on the inscrutability of God
- 1 Cor. 13: an exposition on the superiority of love
- Eph. 1:3–14: a doxology on the redemptive work of God in Christ
- Eph. 5:14: a verse promising the life and light of Christ to believers
- Phil. 2:6–11: a doxology on the self-abasement and the ensuing exaltation of Christ
- Col. 1:15–20: an exposition on the person of Christ and God's work through him

- 1 Tim. 3:16: a short litany on the coming of Christ to earth and his return to heaven
- 2 Tim. 2:11–13: a promise that suffering for Christ leads to glory

19.8

Colossians 3:20–21—Parenting Advice from Paul and Ben Sira

The letters to Ephesians and Colossians offer the apostle Paul’s advice to children and fathers regarding discipline and obedience. This counsel makes for interesting comparison with the much longer advice offered to fathers by the second-century-BCE teacher Ben Sira, whose words are presented in the deuterocanonical book of Sirach (part of what Protestant Christians call the Apocrypha).

Ephesians 6:1–4	Colossians 3:20–21	Sirach 30:1–13
<p>Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother”—this is the first commandment with a promise: “so that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.”</p> <p>And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.</p>	<p>Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is your acceptable duty in the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, or they may lose heart.</p>	<p>He who loves his son will whip him often, so that he may rejoice at the way he turns out. He who disciplines his son will profit by him, and will boast of him among acquaintances. He who teaches his son will make his enemies envious, and will glory in him among his friends. When the father dies he will not seem to be dead, for he has left behind him one like himself, whom in his life he looked upon with joy and at death, without grief. He has left behind him an avenger against his enemies, and one to repay the kindness of his friends.</p> <p>Whoever spoils his son will bind up his wounds, and will suffer heartache at every cry. An unbroken horse turns out stubborn, and an unchecked son turns out</p>

		<p>headstrong. Pamper a child, and he will terrorize you; play with him, and he will grieve you. Do not laugh with him, or you will have sorrow with him, and in the end you will gnash your teeth. Give him no freedom in his youth, and do not ignore his errors. Bow down his neck in his youth, and beat his sides while he is young, or else he will become stubborn and disobey you, and you will have sorrow of soul from him. Discipline your son and make his yoke heavy, so that you may not be offended by his shamelessness.</p>
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19.9

Justification for *Haustafeln* in the Ten Commandments (Philo)

Philo of Alexandria (ca. 25 BCE–ca. 50 CE) was a Hellenistic Jewish writer contemporaneous with Jesus. In one of his documents, he explains that the modern household codes so popular in the Roman world find support in the Jewish Scriptures, since they can be viewed as spelling out the implications of the fourth commandment¹ (“Honor your father and your mother”).

In the fifth commandment on honouring parents we have a suggestion of many necessary laws drawn up to deal with the relations of old to young, rulers to subjects, benefactors to benefited, slaves to masters.

For parents belong to the superior class of the above-mentioned pairs, that which comprises seniors, rulers, benefactors and masters, while children occupy the lower position with juniors, subjects, receivers of benefits and slaves. And there are many other instructions given, to the young on courtesy to the old, to the old on taking care of the young, to subjects on obeying their rulers, to rulers on promoting the welfare of their subjects, to recipients of benefits on requiting them with gratitude, to those who have given of their own initiative on not seeking to get repayment as though it were a debt, to servants on rendering an

affectionate loyalty to their masters, to masters on showing the gentleness and kindness by which inequality is equalized.²

1. “Honor your father and mother” is the fourth commandment according to traditional numbering used in Jewish, Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Lutheran communities. Other Protestant traditions often follow a different system of numbering developed by John Calvin. According to that system, “Honor your father and mother” would be the fifth commandment.

2. Philo, “On the Decalogue (*De Decalogo*),” trans. F. H. Colson, Loeb Classical Library, vol. 7 (London: Harvard University Press, 1998), 98.

19.10

Powerful Spiritual Beings (Box 17.3)

The cosmic dimension of Christ's victory over powerful spiritual beings is emphasized in Ephesians (see 1:20–21; 3:10) and also in Colossians (see 1:13; 2:10, 15). We read about:

- rulers (Eph. 1:21; 2:2; 3:10; 6:12; Col. 1:16; 2:10, 15; cf. Rom. 8:38; 1 Cor. 15:24)
- authorities (Eph. 1:21; 3:10; 6:12; Col. 1:13, 16; 2:10, 15; cf. 1 Cor. 15:24)
- powers (Eph. 1:21; cf. Rom. 8:38; 1 Cor. 15:24)
- cosmic powers (Eph. 6:12)
- dominions (Eph. 1:21; Col. 1:16)
- thrones (Col. 1:16)

Six different designations are used in Greek, though English Bibles do not translate the words consistently; the phrase “elemental spirits of the universe” (Col. 2:8, 20) seems generic.

Who or what are these spiritual beings? The author and original readers of Ephesians would have believed that they were living creatures, not biological entities “of blood and flesh” (Eph. 6:12), but just as real as humans or animals. Angels and demons may be the best-known examples of such beings, along with the devil, who is called “the ruler of the power of the air” (2:2), and elsewhere in the New Testament is referred to as “the god of this world” (2 Cor. 4:4).

Jews and Christians often identified the gods of other religions as powerful spiritual beings as well, not denying their existence but, rather, identifying them as inferior rivals to the one true God.

In Ephesians these powerful spiritual beings are presented as evil forces intent on dominating people's lives and influencing world affairs. They are the true enemies of believers (6:12). Ephesians says that Christ has been elevated to a position of dominance over them (1:20–21), that the church shares in this exaltation (1:22–23; 2:6; 3:10), and that God equips believers for the ongoing struggle against such spiritual forces of evil in “this present darkness” (6:12).

19.11

Authorship of Colossians

Colossians is somewhat different from the undisputed letters of Paul in both style and theology.

- Style: Colossians uses more long sentences (both 1:3–8 and 2:8–15 are just one sentence in Greek), more redundant adjectives (e.g., “holy and blameless and irreproachable”; 1:22), far more participles and relative clauses, and far fewer conjunctions.
- Theology: Colossians is said to evince a higher Christology, a more developed ecclesiology, and a more “realized” view of eschatology (i.e., more emphasis on present benefits than future hope).

These observations lead scholars to question whether the letter was actually written by Paul or whether it should be regarded as a pseudepigraphical composition. At least three scenarios are possible.

Colossians Was Written by Paul the Apostle

A number of scholars think that Colossians was indeed written by Paul. They note that there are stylistic differences between Colossians and the other letters of Paul, but they assume that these can be explained by Paul’s use of a secretary or amanuensis—

someone who did not simply “take dictation” but instead had responsibility for crafting the letter as a literary composition. This person’s role may have been weightier with regard to this particular letter, because Paul was in prison and unable to participate as actively in the composition of the letter as he might have done otherwise. Furthermore, those who believe that Paul wrote the letter think that the theological developments noted above can be explained as a consequence of Paul responding to the false philosophy at Colossae.

Most scholars who see Paul as the author of Colossians think that the letter probably was written near the end of his life, from his final imprisonment in Rome (since that would allow for the greater development of ideas that do not recur in other letters). It is also assumed, however, that he wrote the letter prior to the earthquake that hit the city in 61. Thus a likely date for Colossians would be around 60, early in Paul’s Roman imprisonment. He sent the letter to the church by Tychicus (4:7), with instructions that it be read aloud to the church and then exchanged with the church of Laodicea, which was in possession of another letter (4:16).

Alternative Suggestions: According to one suggestion, Paul may have written the letter from Caesarea, where he was kept in prison for two years before being sent to Rome (see Acts 23:31–26:32).¹ According to a second suggestion, Paul wrote Colossians during a still earlier imprisonment in the city of Ephesus.²

Colossians Was Written by a Disciple of Paul

A second proposal allows that Paul did not write this letter himself but, rather, that the author was someone closely associated with Paul and well versed in his theology. For instance, the letter might have been written by Timothy, who, doing his best to express what Paul would have wanted to say, included Paul's name as coauthor. Some scholars have even suggested that Paul was still alive and was willing to authorize the letter (and sign it), even if everything was not worded exactly as he would have preferred, had the conditions of his imprisonment not prevented him from taking a more active part in the actual composition. If some such scenario lies behind the production of Colossians, then the date and provenance would still be as suggested above, around 60 from Rome.

Colossians Was Written by Later Followers of Paul's Theology

Some scholars think that the development of ideas evident in the letter evinces a second generation of thought not likely to have been embraced by Paul or his contemporaries. Accordingly, according to this idea, the letter must have been written several years after Paul's death. It may have been produced within a circle of Pauline devotees who felt that they could confidently affix his name to the piece. This proposal resolves both the anomaly of the letter's distinctive style and the problem of its distinctive theology. It does seem curious to some, however, that Pauline students would choose as the

destination for a pseudepigraphical letter the church in Colossae—a church that Paul did not found and had never visited, in a town that in 61 had been destroyed by an earthquake. The usual rationale offered for this seemingly odd choice of Colossae is that the Pauline students were using Paul’s letter to Philemon as a reference, and that letter had been sent to Colossae (where Philemon apparently lived).

Other scholars, however, think that if this theory is accepted, then the alleged signature to Colossians (4:18) and putative personal references that are contained in this letter would have to be regarded as a deliberate attempt to deceive readers into believing that the letter had been penned at an earlier time, by Paul himself. Would Paul’s students have perpetrated such a fraud? Those who advocate for such a scenario believe that this is an anachronistic view of “authorship”: the ancient world, they claim, was open to the literary fiction of pseudepigraphical writing and did not consider it deceptive. Proponents of this view usually date Colossians to the 80s and view it as marking a transitional phase between the authentic theology of Paul represented by the seven undisputed letters and the “deutero-Pauline theology” that comes to fuller expression in the (also pseudepigraphical) letter to the Ephesians.

Conclusion

The decision about whether Paul wrote Colossians usually depends on the amount of latitude that an interpreter is willing to grant Paul

with regard to consistency of expression and development of thought. The question becomes this: Is it possible (or likely) that the person responsible for the undisputed letters could also have thought this way and allowed his thoughts to be expressed in this manner?

1. See Bo Reicke, "Caesarea, Rome and the Captivity Epistles," in *Apostolic History and the Gospel*, ed. W. Ward Gasque and Ralph P Martin (Exeter, UK: Paternoster, 1970), 277–86.

2. See Ralph P. Martin, *Colossians and Philemon*, 2nd ed., NCenBC (London: Oliphants, 1978), 22–32.

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19.12

Literary Siblings: Relationship of Ephesians to Colossians

Ephesians is remarkably similar to the letter of Paul to the
Colossians:

- Somewhere between one-half and one-third of the 155 verses in Ephesians have close parallels to the material found in Colossians.
- In many cases, these parallels occur in the same order of presentation.
- A few passages are very close in wording (cf. Eph. 1:4 with Col. 1:22; Eph. 1:15 with Col. 1:4; Eph. 6:21–22 with Col. 4:7–8).

Most scholars believe that Colossians was written first and that whoever wrote Ephesians was familiar with the contents of that letter. This seems to make sense, because Ephesians has the more generic tone, presenting general reflection on points that, in Colossians, are made with reference to a specific situation.

This allows for a number of possibilities:

- Paul wrote Colossians as a specific letter to a particular church, and then he wrote Ephesians as a more general letter dealing with the same subject matter.

- Paul wrote Colossians, and later someone else used Colossians as a template to create Ephesians as a pseudepigraphical letter written in Paul's name.
- Paul wrote neither Colossians nor Ephesians; some pseudonymous author wrote both letters.
- One pseudonymous author wrote Colossians, and later a different pseudonymous author used Colossians as a template to create Ephesians.

19.13

Distinctive Aspects of Colossians (Box 19.4)

Distinctive Style

Compared to the undisputed letters, Colossians uses more long sentences (1:3–8 and 2:8–15 are each just one sentence in Greek), more redundant adjectives (e.g., “holy and blameless and irreproachable” [1:22]), far more participles and relative clauses, and far fewer conjunctions.

Distinctive Theology

Compared to the undisputed letters, Colossians is said to evince a higher Christology, a more developed ecclesiology, and a more “realized” view of eschatology (i.e., more emphasis on present benefits than future hope).

19.14

Development of Pauline Ideas in Colossians (Box 19.5)

The Letter to the Colossians seems to expand on many ideas found in other (undisputed) letters of Paul, taking the points a step further or to another level.

- Romans says that believers have died and been buried with Christ through baptism and will someday be united with him in resurrection (6:4–6); Colossians says that believers have already “been raised with Christ” through baptism (2:12; cf. 3:1; but see also Rom. 6:11).
- Romans says that believers have died to sin (6:2); Colossians says that they have “died to the elemental spirits of the universe” (2:20).
- Romans says that no spiritual being or power will “be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ” (8:39); Colossians says that Christ disarmed the spiritual rulers and authorities and “made a public example of them, triumphing over them” (2:15; cf. 1 Cor. 15:24).
- First Corinthians says that Jesus Christ is the one “through whom are all things and through whom we exist” (8:6); Colossians presents Christ as the one in whom “all things in

heaven and on earth were created” (1:16) and in whom “all things hold together” (1:17).

- Second Corinthians says that Paul’s sufferings manifest the death of Jesus in Paul’s body (4:8–12); Colossians says that Paul’s sufferings serve the vicarious function of “completing what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church” (1:24).
- Philippians refers to Christ as being “in the form of God” (2:6); Colossians refers to Christ as “the image of the invisible God” (1:15) and as the one in whom “the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” (2:9).

Are these points on which Paul has further developed his own thinking? Or are they instances of a pseudonymous author building on Paul’s ideas?

19.15

“Realized Eschatology”: What Would Paul Think?

The letter to the Colossians is often said to espouse a “realized eschatology,” according to which believers have already been “raised with Christ” (2:12; 3:1). This is different from what Paul says in his “undisputed letters” (the letters that all scholars agree were written by him). Paul says in his undisputed letters that believers have been “crucified with Christ” (Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20); he says that they have “died with Christ” (Rom. 6:8); he even says that they have been “buried with Christ” (Rom. 6:4). But he does not say that they have been raised with Christ.

Scholars who think that Colossians is pseudepigraphical point to the “realized eschatology” of the letter as a prime example of a development in Pauline thought that the apostle himself would have rejected. Paul, they say, did not like the idea of “realized eschatology,” because it encourages an unrealistic faith that cannot hold up to the experience of suffering in the present age. Paul regards “sharing in Christ’s resurrection” as an experience that is reserved for the future (Rom. 6:5, 8; Phil. 3:10–12). He is careful to preserve a distinction between what is “already” and what is “not yet.”

Scholars who think that Paul is the author of Colossians grant that the language used here is not characteristic of him, but they claim

that the basic concept of Christ's resurrection empowering one's present life (Phil. 4:13) and defining one's current status (Phil. 3:20) is consistent with Paul's general outlook. Furthermore, they maintain that Colossians does not relax the dichotomy between what is "already" and what is "not yet" completely. In Colossians, the mystery of the gospel is expressed in one phrase: "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (1:27; cf. 2:2; 4:3). In that defining dictum, the dichotomy remains: "Christ in you" is *already* (it is a present experience); "glory" is *not yet* (it remains a future hope [cf. 1:5; 3:4]).

19.16

What Was the Colossian Heresy? (Box 19.2)

More than forty proposals have been offered regarding the nature of the philosophy that the Letter to the Colossians seeks to oppose.

Here are some sample suggestions:

- a Jewish Christian movement that insisted that gentile Christians must be circumcised and keep the law of Moses, similar to the “Judaizers” opposed by Paul in Galatians (cf. Gal. 3:19; 4:3–9)
- an esoteric and rigorous form of Judaism, comparable to that practiced by the Essenes at Qumran
- a mystical form of Judaism, like the Merkabah tradition, so named because asceticism and strict adherence to the law allowed devotees to travel in the spirit to the heavenly throne room in a celestial chariot called a *merkabah*
- a syncretistic religious amalgam of beliefs, combining elements from Jewish tradition with elements of astral religion
- some variety of a Greco-Roman “mystery religion,” which emphasized the hidden nature of spiritual truth revealed only to the spiritually elite
- incipient gnosticism, a precursor of what would develop into prominent antimaterialist religious systems in the second century CE

- Pythagorean philosophy, based on the teaching of Pythagoras (sixth century BCE), who thought that the sun, moon, and stars were spirits that control human destiny and that the human soul must be purified through ascetic practices

19.17

Divine Wisdom and the “Colossian Hymn”

Colossians 1:15–20 describes the exalted Christ in words that probably derive from an early Christian hymn or confession:

¹⁵He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation;

¹⁶for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created,
things visible and invisible,

whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers

—all things have been created through him and for him.

¹⁷He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold
together.

¹⁸He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the
firstborn from the dead,

so that he might come to have first place in everything.

¹⁹For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,

²⁰and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all
things,

whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the
blood of his cross.

These verses also provide us with a clue as to how such an understanding of Christ might have developed in the early church. Many of the ideas attributed to Christ in Colossians 1:15–20 were

also attached to the personified figure of Wisdom in certain Jewish writings that were familiar to Paul and other Jewish Christians at the time. Look at these statements from the book of Proverbs and two writings from the Old Testament Apocrypha, Sirach and Wisdom of Solomon:

- Wisdom is “a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness” (Wis. 7:26; cf. Col. 1:15, 19).
- Wisdom was “before all other things” (Sir. 1:4; cf. Col. 1:17).
- Wisdom was present with God before creation (Prov. 8:22–31; cf. Col. 1:15).
- Wisdom served as God’s agent through whom everything in heaven and earth was made (Prov. 3:19; 8:27–31; Wis. 7:22; 8:4–6; 9:2; cf. Col. 1:16).
- Wisdom “holds all things together” and “orders all things well” (Wis. 1:7; 8:1; cf. Col. 1:17).
- Wisdom reconciles people to God, making them to be “friends of God” (Wis. 7:14, 27; cf. Col. 1:20).

This is poetic language, and we do not know how literally readers would have taken it (Did they believe Wisdom was an actual divine being?). Still, the words of what is sometimes called the “Colossian Hymn” (Col. 1:15–20) apply to Christ what these sacred Jewish texts said about Wisdom. This is a good indication of one prominent

resource that early Christians used in coming to understand who
Jesus Christ was in relation to God and in relation to the world.

19.18

Worldwide Evangelism: Is Paul Exaggerating?

(Box 19.6)

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus tells his disciples that the gospel “will be proclaimed throughout the world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come” (24:14). The Letter to the Colossians seems to indicate that this mission has been fulfilled. The gospel “has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven” (1:23) and “is bearing fruit and growing in the whole world” (1:6).

There were people in the world at the time who had not heard of Jesus Christ, as well as entire nations (including ones known to Paul) to which no Christian missionary had traveled. So what do we make of this extraordinary claim?

Most scholars take the words as an example of hyperbole—that is, an obvious exaggeration used for rhetorical effect (e.g., when someone in our modern society says, “I’ve told you a million times . . .”). In 1 Thessalonians Paul likewise tells the readers that the news of their faith has become known not just in their own country, or in the neighboring province, but “in every place” (1:8).

19.19

Nailed to the Cross (Box 19.1)

Colossians 2:14 uses a memorable image for how God forgave human trespasses (2:13) through Christ's death. When a person was crucified, the Roman executioners attached to the cross a list of the condemned person's crimes. Colossians says that the record of human failings—the list of all accusations that could be brought against human beings—was “nailed to the cross” of Christ. This is a colorful way of saying “Jesus died for our sins.” See also Colossians 1:14, 20, 22.

19.20

Slaves and Masters (Box 19.7)

Colossians 3:18–4:1 presents a *Haustafel* (table of household responsibilities) similar to the one in Ephesians 5:21–6:9. This one emphasizes the duties of slaves, perhaps because of a recent issue in the congregation in which Onesimus, the slave of Philemon, had run away from his master, only to be sent back to him by Paul (Philem. 8–18; cf. Col. 4:9). As in Paul's approach to that situation, the attitude toward slavery here is ambiguous.

On the one hand, slaves are instructed to obey their masters in everything (3:22; on this, cf. Eph. 6:5; 1 Tim. 6:1–2; Titus 2:9–10; 1 Pet. 2:18–21). On the other hand, masters are instructed to treat their slaves justly and fairly and to do so in recognition of their equality before God (Col. 4:1). For those whom Christ has clothed with a new way of being human (3:10), the distinction between “slave and free” has become ultimately meaningless (3:11).

19.21

The Letter from Laodicea

The recipients of the letter to the Colossians are told, “When this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and see that you read also the letter from Laodicea” (Col. 4:16). What was this “letter from Laodicea” that the Colossians were to read?

The traditional view is that Paul wrote a letter to the Laodiceans that has not survived. Some Christians throughout history have been bothered by the notion of such a work being lost, and at least two people in the second century took it upon themselves to “fill the gap” by writing letters from Paul to the Laodiceans that could be included in the Christian canon. One of these apparently reflected the ideas of the heretic Marcion, and we know of it only because certain documents (e.g., the Muratorian Canon) warn churches not to be tricked into using it. But another “Letter to the Laodiceans” was very brief and uncontroversial: a pastiche of pious verses that seem to have been stitched together from other letters of Paul. This latter book became extremely popular and was found in Latin manuscripts of the New Testament down through the Middle Ages.¹

An alternative suggestion holds that the letter mentioned in Colossians 4:16 is actually the letter that we know as Paul’s epistle to the Ephesians; that it is called “the letter *from* Laodicea” might

indicate that it was sent to Ephesus with instructions for it to be passed on to Laodicea and then, from there, sent to Colossae. This theory receives some support from the fact that a second-century writer (the aforementioned heretic Marcion, ironically) refers to the letter that we know as Ephesians as Paul's "Letter to the Laodiceans." Did he have a copy of "Ephesians" that was associated with Laodicea? We can only speculate, but if our letter to the Ephesians was in fact the "letter from Laodicea" that Paul had in mind, then that letter has not been lost after all.

1. The text of this apocryphal work appears in Bart Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures: Books That Did Not Make It into the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 164.

19.22

Colossians and the Nicene Creed

The influence of Colossians can be seen in the language of the Nicene Creed, recited regularly by many Christians as a summary of their faith.

- The Nicene Creed affirms that through Christ “all things were made,” including “heaven and earth” and “all that is, seen and unseen.” Compare Colossians: “In him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible” (1:16).
- The Nicene Creed identifies Christ as “true God of true God” and “of one Being with the Father.” Compare Colossians: Christ is “the image of the invisible God” (1:15) and the one in whom “all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell” (1:19).
- The Nicene Creed says that Christ “became incarnate” and “became truly human.” Compare Colossians: Christ, who was “before all things” (1:17), took on a “fleshly body” (1:22) so that God could dwell in him “bodily” (2:9).
- The Nicene Creed affirms that Christ was raised from the dead and that he ascended into heaven, where he is “seated at the right hand of the Father.” Compare Colossians: Christ has been raised and is “seated at the right hand of God” (3:1).

- The Nicene Creed affirms that Christ “will come again in glory.” Compare Colossians: Christ will be revealed “in glory” (3:4).

20.0

1 Thessalonians: Outline of Contents

- I. Salutation (1:1)
- II. Thanksgiving for the Thessalonians' faith and example (1:2–10)
- III. Main body of the letter (2:1–5:11)
 - A. Expression of ongoing concern for the Thessalonians (2:1–3:13)
 - 1. Past ministry in Thessalonica (2:1–16)
 - 2. Desire to see the Thessalonians again (2:17–3:5)
 - 3. Response to Timothy's report (3:6–13)
 - B. Ethical instructions for living in a pagan environment (4:1–12)
 - C. Teaching regarding death of believers and the Second Coming of Christ (4:13–5:11)
- IV. Closing (5:12–28)
 - A. Final exhortations (5:12–25)
 - B. Greetings (5:26–27)
 - C. Benediction (5:28)

Courtesy of *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, ed. Mark Allan Powell (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 1035.

20.1

1 Thessalonians in the Revised Common Lectionary

Text	Series	Liturgical Occasion	Calendar Date
1:1–10	A	Lectionary 29	Oct. 16–22
2:1–8	A	Lectionary 30	Oct. 23–29
2:9–13	A	Lectionary 31	Oct. 30–Nov. 5
3:9–13	C	Advent 1	4 Sundays before Dec. 25
4:13–18	A	Lectionary 32	Nov. 6–12
5:1–11	A	Lectionary 33	Nov. 13–19
5:16–24	B	Advent 3	2 Sundays before Dec. 25

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20.3

Evangelical Reminders (Box 20.1)

One striking characteristic of 1 Thessalonians is the number of times that Paul reminds his readers of things that they already know.

- “You know what kind of persons we proved to be” (1:5).
- “You yourselves know . . . our coming to you was not in vain” (2:1).
- “As you know, we had courage in our God” (2:2).
- “As you know . . . we never came with words of flattery or with a pretext for greed” (2:5).
- “You remember our labor and toil” (2:9).
- “You are witnesses . . . how pure, upright, and blameless our conduct was” (2:10).
- “As you know, we dealt with each one of you like a father with his children” (2:11).
- “You yourselves know that this is what we are destined for” (3:3).
- “We told you beforehand that we were to suffer . . . so it turned out, as you know” (3:4).
- “You know what instructions we gave you” (4:2).
- “The Lord is an avenger . . . as we have already told you” (4:6).

- “Concerning love . . . you do not need to have anyone write to you” (4:9).
- “Work with your hands, as we directed you” (4:11).
- “Concerning the times and seasons . . . you do not need to have anything written to you” (5:1).
- “You yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief” (5:2).

20.4

Tombstone Inscription (Box 20.5)

A legend on tombstones in the Roman Empire read:

Non Fui

Fui

Non Sum

Non Curo

Translation: I didn't exist / I did exist / I don't exist / I don't care.

20.5

Kissing Christians (Box 20.7)

Paul closes his letter to the Thessalonians with this exhortation:

“Greet all the brothers and sisters [*adelphoi*] with a holy kiss” (5:26).

He closes three of his later letters with the more generic exhortation,

“Greet one another with a holy kiss” (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20;

2 Cor. 13:12).

In the early years of Christianity, followers of Jesus were noted for kissing one another (probably, though not necessarily, on the lips) and for making the exchange of such greetings a part of their public liturgy. Paul’s emphasis that this greeting was to be a “*holy kiss*” (cf. 1 Pet. 5:14) makes clear that nothing erotic was implied. Still, the practice was a novel one.

In the biblical world, kissing appears to have been commonplace between family members (Gen. 27:26–27; Exod. 18:7) and friends (1 Sam. 20:41). Men kissed men (2 Sam. 20:9) and women kissed women (Ruth 1:9, 14) as expressions of welcome (Gen. 29:13; Exod. 4:27), favor (2 Sam. 15:5), blessing (Gen. 48:9–10; 2 Sam. 19:39), farewell (Gen. 31:28, 55; 1 Kings 19:20), grief (Gen. 50:1), and reconciliation (Gen. 33:4; 45:15). However, there does not appear to have been any precedent in Jewish or Greco-Roman society for kissing between men and women who were not either relatives (Gen. 29:11–12) or lovers (Song 1:2; 8:1).

The New Testament contains references to kisses similar to what is found elsewhere in the Bible (Mark 14:45; Luke 15:20; Acts 20:37), but it also introduces this new concept of a “holy kiss” that might be shared by believers regardless of gender, rank, or race. This practice probably can be traced to the teaching of Jesus that identified his followers as family members (Mark 3:35). Based on this idea, a greeting shared between literal brothers and sisters became a symbolic act expressing the spiritual relationship between those who were one family in Christ.

In the second century, the ritual exchange of a “kiss of peace” became a standard component of the Sunday morning liturgy (see Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 66).

For more on this subject, see Michael Philip Penn, *Kissing Christians: Ritual and Community in the Late Ancient Church* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).

20.6

1 Thessalonians 1:3; 5:8—“Theological Virtues” and the Names of Saints

In 1 Corinthians 13:13, the apostle Paul writes, “And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.” The same triad of virtues is mentioned near the beginning and the end of 1 Thessalonians:

We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. (1:2–3)

But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. (5:8)

See also Galatians 5:5–6; Colossians 1:4–5; Hebrews 10:22–24.

The KJV used the word “charity” in place of “love” in these passages.

In Elizabethan English, “charity” did not have the sense it has acquired in our modern day but simply meant “unselfish love.”

Theological Virtues

Faith, hope, and charity were identified early in church history as “the theological virtues,” because unlike the classical virtues (prudence,

temperance, fortitude, and justice) they were said to have God as their formal object.

The virtues are supremely practiced when one has faith *in God*, hope *in God*, and love *for God*. As such, they constitute spiritual perfection, with ensuing moral implication.

So Augustine (345–430) writes, “Thus a man supported by faith, hope, and charity, with an unshaken hold upon them, does not need the Scriptures except for the instruction of others” (*Enchiridion de fide, spe, et caritate* 3–4).

Names of Saints

During the reign of Hadrian (117–138 CE), a Roman matron named Sophia (Greek for “wisdom”) had three daughters named Pistis (“Faith”), Elpis (“Hope”), and Agape (“Charity”). She and her daughters were martyred and the daughters were canonized as Saint Faith, Saint Hope, and Saint Charity. For six hundred years, pilgrims visited their tomb in the crypt of St. Pancratius Church on the Aurelian Way.

At a later time (the date is uncertain), another woman named Sapientia (Latin for “wisdom”) is said to have been martyred along with three companions who were named Spes, Fides, and Caritas (Latin for “Hope,” “Faith,” and “Charity”). They were buried near the tomb of Saint Cecilia in the cemetery of Saint Callistus on the Appian

Way. While they were not canonized as saints, their tomb did become a pilgrimage site.

Skeptics have thought it unlikely that two groups of martyred women would have borne the same names—much less, names so fraught with biblical meaning. But some scholars point out that these were common names for Christian women in the early centuries, making the coincidence a tad less incredible.

20.7

Faith, Love, and Hope (Box 20.3)

Paul mentions faith, love, and hope at the beginning and the end of 1 Thessalonians:

- “We always give thanks . . . constantly remembering . . . your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ” (1:2–3).
- “Put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation” (5:8).

Paul talks about “faith, hope, and love” in 1 Corinthians 13:13, and he lists “love” last because, he says, it is the most important of the three. In 1 Thessalonians, however, he lists “hope” last because, for this church at this time, the message of hope seems to be what is most important. Paul says that Timothy has brought him a good report regarding the Thessalonians’ “faith and love” (3:6), but he does not mention any good report about them excelling in hope. When he goes on to say that he wants to restore what is lacking in their faith (3:10), many interpreters assume that he is speaking of the missing element of hope. The Thessalonians are famous for their faith (1:8), and they abound in love (3:12; 4:9–10), but they need to be encouraged with a message of hope (4:13, 18).

20.8

The Jews and God's Wrath (Box 20.2)

In one section of 1 Thessalonians, Paul goes off on a brief tangent of condemnation against “the Jews” (2:14–16). He levels six charges: (1) they persecuted Christians in Judea; (2) they killed the Lord Jesus; (3) they killed the prophets; (4) they drove Paul and his companions out—probably a reference to forcing them to leave Macedonia (cf. Acts 17:5, 13–14); (5) they displease God; and (6) they “oppose everyone” by hindering the Christian evangelization of gentiles. Paul says that by doing such things, the Jews have been “filling up the measure of their sins” and that now God’s wrath has overtaken them at last.

These verses have had a terrible influence in Christian history, inspiring anti-Semitism and lending support to centuries of mistreatment of Jewish people at the hands of gentiles versed in the Christian Scriptures.

Scholars note that the verses are not typical of Paul. Elsewhere Paul identifies *himself* as a persecutor of the church (Gal. 1:22–23; cf. Acts 7:58). Instead of blaming the Jews for killing Jesus, he attributes the death of Jesus to “the rulers of this age” (1 Cor. 2:8), by which he probably means evil spiritual powers (cf. Col. 2:15). And rather than speaking of anyone incurring God’s wrath for killing

Jesus, Paul normally speaks of Jesus giving his life voluntarily in order that people might be saved from God's wrath (Rom. 5:6–9).

Paul was often in conflict with his fellow Jews, and he claims to have suffered at their hands (2 Cor. 11:24). Still, the attitude expressed in 1 Thessalonians 2:14–16 seems markedly different from his statements about God's continued dealings with Israel elsewhere (Rom. 9:1–5; 10:1–4; 11:25–32). A few scholars wonder whether these verses (1 Thess. 2:14–16) might have been written by someone other than Paul and inserted into this letter at a later date, but there is no direct evidence in any of our manuscripts to support that supposition. More often, the verses are regarded as “polemical hyperbole”—an angry rant that exemplifies the rhetorical tactics of the day but surely does not represent Paul's full or reasoned view on the subject. It is possible that he understood such rhetoric as being in line with Israel's own Scriptures, which contain numerous passages that speak words of condemnation against God's chosen people (cf. Deut. 32; 2 Chron. 36:15–21; Amos 6:1–8).

Other New Testament examples of polemical rants against Jews are found in Matthew 23:13–39; John 8:39–47; Acts 7:51–53.

20.9

Good Grief (Box 20.4)

In 1 Thessalonians 4:13 Paul says that he does not want the believers to “grieve as others do who have no hope.” A popular text for Christian funerals and memorial services, this passage typically is interpreted as encouraging a distinctive, Christian grief that is grounded in the promise of life after death. Paul does not say that the Thessalonians should not grieve for their lost loved ones—that would be unrealistic and unhealthy. Rather, he says that their grief should be different from the grief of people who have no hope of ever seeing their loved ones again. The Christian Thessalonians are not to be “uninformed about those who have died.” They know that the dead in Christ will rise and that all who believe, living and dead, will be reunited to be with the Lord forever (4:16–18). Such knowledge does not cancel out the grief or sorrow of experiencing the loss of loved ones in this life, but Paul nevertheless urges the grief-stricken Thessalonians to “encourage one another with these words” (4:18).

20.10

1 Thessalonians 4:16–17—Caught Up in the Clouds (Box 20.6)

In some circles, 1 Thessalonians is valued for providing the primary biblical reference (or “proof text”) for what is called the “rapture”:

The Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call and with the sound of God’s trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air. (1 Thess. 4:16–17)

The Greek word translated as “caught up” (*harpazein*) in this passage is used elsewhere to describe people being snatched by God’s Spirit (Acts 8:39) or transported into heaven (2 Cor. 12:2–4). Paul seems to be saying that all Christians (alive and dead) will be miraculously lifted up into heaven by God (cf. Matt. 24:40–41; Luke 17:34–35).

The Greek word translated as “meet” (*apantēsis*) in the phrase “meet the Lord” is often used with reference to a custom of the day. People expecting an important visitor often went out from house or city to intercept and escort the approaching traveler on the final leg of the journey (Matt. 25:6; Acts 28:15). Thus Paul might be saying that as Jesus returns, all Christians (living and dead) will rise into heaven to

meet him halfway; they will then join him in a triumphant procession as he continues his descent to earth.

The term *rapture* (an English word formed from the Latin for “caught up”) has come to be associated with one particular scenario of end-time events: the notion that faithful Christians will be taken up into heaven at some point before the return of Christ, while others are left behind to deal with a time of unprecedented tribulation. Christians who say that they “believe in the rapture” often mean that they accept this particular doctrine of a miraculous pretribulation deliverance of believers. Christians who say that they “don’t believe in the rapture” may nevertheless expect to be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord Jesus when he returns; they just don’t accept the particular scenario for a pretribulation deliverance with which the term *rapture* has come to be associated.

20.11

1 Thessalonians 1:2–3—Labor of Love

A bit of Bible trivia: the expression “labor of love” appears to have been used for the first time in 1 Thessalonians 1:2–3. Paul writes, “We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and **labor of love** and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.” The phrase also appears in Hebrews 6:10, where the KJV preserves the more precise syntax: “For God *is* not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love.” Scholars speculate that the apostle Paul coined the phrase and they sometimes point to the usage in Hebrews as an indication that the author of that letter was familiar with Paul’s works.

Of course, it could simply have been a phrase current at the time, which Paul and the author of Hebrews used independently; we have no evidence of it elsewhere but that could be due to a paucity of our sources. In any case, the phrase would be used for centuries in exclusively religious contexts, often with clear allusion to Paul’s scriptural bidding.

Eventually, however, it would take on a more secular meaning. Shakespeare notably chose to title one of his plays *Love’s Labour Lost*, perhaps intending a play on words that took the word “love” in a romantic rather than a spiritual sense. In time, the phrase “labor of

love” became applicable to any task that one undertakes voluntarily rather than for compensation.

One authority notes that for Benjamin Franklin, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry David Thoreau, and Ralph Waldo Emerson, “the expression is merely proverbial, with little or no recollection of its biblical source.”¹ In our current era, the phrase “labor of love” has likewise entered the modern idiom without any apparent allusion to Paul or the New Testament:

- *Labour of Love* was a 1983 reggae album by U240
- “Labour of Love” was a 1987 pop song by the Scottish duo Hue and Cry
- “Labor of Love” was a 1993 pop song by the Australian alternative rock group Frente
- *Labor of Love* was a 1995 country album by Radney Foster
- *Labor of Love* was a 1997 country album by Sammy Kershaw
- *Labor of Love* was a 2016 book about dating by Moira Weigel

It just turned out to be a memorable phrase!

But returning to the religious context—albeit with a completely different meaning—“Labor of Love” is also the title of a 2004 Christmas song written by Andrew Peterson. It recounts the travail of

Mary's difficult delivery ("labor" = childbirth) and has been recorded by numerous artists, including country star Randy Travis.

1. David Lyle Jeffrey, ed., *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 430.

20.12

1 Thessalonians 1:3; 5:8—Faith, Hope, Charity

In 1 Corinthians 13:13, the apostle Paul writes, “And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.” These three virtues—faith, hope, and love (“charity” in the KJV)—are also mentioned near the beginning and the end of 1 Thessalonians:

We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. (1:2–3)

But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. (5:8)

See also Galatians 5:5–6; Colossians 1:4–5; Hebrews 10:22–24.

What could anybody have against these three things?

A. M. Klein (1909–1972) was a Canadian lawyer, poet, and novelist best known for works that reflected the cultural heritage of Jewish people and that drew inspiration from a wealth of Jewish legend, tradition, and folklore. However, in one poem, “Of Faith, Hope, and Charity,” he lashes out at what he took to be attributes of unhealthy or least unsavory piety: faith, hope, and charity.

20.13

1 Thessalonians 4:3–5—Self-Control

The True Love Waits campaign is a movement among evangelical Christian groups that focuses on encouraging teenagers to abstain from premarital sex. The campaign has been associated with ceremonies according to which teenagers make “virginity pledges” and then wear “chastity rings” as symbols of their commitment to preserve their virginity until marriage.

The campaign apparently derived its name from misheard lyrics of a popular Buddy Holly song. The 1960 song “True Love Ways” (according to some reports, the most-played song at weddings in the United States) features a chorus affirming that two lovers “know true love ways.” These words were frequently misunderstood, however, with the result that many people thought the chorus proclaimed, “No true love waits.” Evangelical Christians responded to the misheard lyric by insisting that, in fact, true love does wait.

In any case, the True Love Waits campaign has typically featured 1 Thessalonians 4:3–5 as its theme verse: “For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from fornication; that each one of you know how to control your own body in holiness and honor, not with lustful passion.”

The True Love Waits campaign would eventually garner some unexpected publicity (support?) from a song associated with the

alternative British rock group Radiohead. Beginning in the mid-1990s, that group would often perform a song called “True Love Waits” in concerts. The song, written in 1995 by Thom Yorke, could have been inspired by misheard Buddy Holly lyrics, but probably was an intentional nod to the virginity/chastity movement, of which York had become cognizant. If so, the name of the movement is employed somewhat metaphorically: the image that the song summons is not specifically “waiting to have sex” but rather yearning to find a reliable, trustworthy relationship. A studio version of “True Love Waits” would eventually be included on Radiohead’s 2016 album, *A Moon Shaped Pool*.

21.0

2 Thessalonians: Outline of Contents

- I. Salutation (1:1–2)
- II. Thanksgiving for the Thessalonians' faith and example (1:3–4)
- III. Main body of the letter (1:5–2:12)
 - A. Introduction of the theme: the Second Coming of Christ (1:5–12)
 - B. Refutation of a rumor that the day of the Lord has already come (2:1–12)
- IV. Closing (2:13–3:5)
 - A. Final exhortations (2:13–15)
 - B. Blessing (2:16–17)
 - C. Request for prayer (3:1–5)
- V. Excursus: Admonition of idleness within the community (3:6–15)
- VI. Closing resumed (3:16–18)
 - A. Blessing (3:16)
 - B. Greeting and signature (3:17)
 - C. Benediction (3:18)

Courtesy of *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, ed. Mark Allan Powell (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 1036.

21.1

2 Thessalonians in the Revised Common Lectionary

Text	Series	Liturgical Occasion	Calendar Date
1:1–4, 11–12	C	Lectionary 31	Oct. 30–Nov. 5
2:1–5, 13–17	C	Lectionary 32	Nov. 6–12
3:6–13	C	Lectionary 33	Nov. 13–19

21.2

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21.3

Christian Freeloaders (Box 21.3)

The generosity of early Christian communities was sometimes put to the test by persons who sought support beyond what was necessary or reasonable.

Some churches practiced a communal lifestyle: members pooled their money and possessions and lived out of a common purse (cf. Acts 2:44–45; 4:32–35). But the book of Acts also reveals that there were unscrupulous people who tried to take advantage of this arrangement (5:1–11).

Problems also arose with traveling missionaries. In keeping with the words of Jesus recorded in Matthew's Gospel, transient preachers were to receive support from the communities that they visited (10:7–15). But a Christian document from around 100 (*Didache* 11:3–6), just fifteen years after the Gospel of Matthew was written, suggests limits for such support:

Act toward the apostles and prophets as the gospel decrees. Let every apostle who comes to you be welcomed as the Lord. But he should not remain more than a day. If he must, he may stay one more. But if he stays three days, he is a false prophet. When an apostle leaves, he should take nothing except bread, until he arrives at his night's lodging. If he asks for money, he is a false prophet.¹

The situation addressed in 2 Thessalonians 3:6–13 may reflect similar tensions in the early church involving the appropriate role of charity. We know from Paul’s letters that the Thessalonian Christians (and other believers in Macedonia) were particularly noted for their generosity; indeed, they were known for giving “beyond their means” and for being generous in ways that they could scarcely afford (2 Cor. 8:2–4). It is not hard to imagine that there were people willing to take advantage of the community’s well-intentioned but naive altruism.

1. Bart Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 2 vols., Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 1:435.

21.4

Antecedents for an Antichrist

Several New Testament writings speak of an ultimate enemy of God who will arise in the last days to deceive many people and establish himself as an object of worship. In 2 Thessalonians this person is called “the lawless one” (2:3–9); elsewhere he is referred to as the “beast” (Rev. 13:1–18) or the “antichrist” (1 John 2:18).

Christian teaching about this eschatological foe has prototypes in biblical and secular history:

- The king of Babylon is depicted as God’s archenemy in Isaiah 14:12–15.
- The prince and king of Tyre are described as setting themselves against God in Ezekiel 28:1–19.
- A beast that opposes God is referred to in the writings of Daniel (7:7–8, 19–27; 8:9–14, 23–25; 9:26–27; 11:21–45; note especially the abomination in the temple in 11:31; cf. Matt. 24:15; 2 Thess. 2:4).
- In 39–41 CE the Roman emperor Caligula decided to put a statue of himself inside the Jerusalem temple for the Jews to worship; he died before actually doing so, but Jews and Christians remained appalled by the intended abomination.

- In the years following Nero's death in 68 CE, rumors circulated that the emperor would rise from the dead as a god opposed to the Jewish-Christian God; this myth of *Nero redivivus* seems to have inspired some comments about the beast in Revelation 13.

21.5

Authorship of 2 Thessalonians

Reasons for Doubting Pauline Authorship

Some scholars think it odd that Paul would repeat so much of what he said in 1 Thessalonians in a second letter written to the same people a few months later. Although 2 Thessalonians is a relatively short letter, about one-third of its contents overlap closely with what Paul just told the Thessalonians in the previous letter. Even the format of the two letters is similar. For example, 1 Thessalonians contains two thanksgivings (1:2; 2:13) and two benedictions (3:11–13; 5:23), a peculiarity that is not typical of Paul’s style but that is repeated in 2 Thessalonians, which also has two thanksgivings (1:3; 2:13) and two benedictions (2:16–17; 3:16). Such duplicated irregularities give the impression that someone might have used 1 Thessalonians as a template to create “a typical Pauline letter” without realizing that these features were not actually characteristic of Paul’s style.

Some scholars think that the advice given in 2 Thessalonians 2:1–12 actually contradicts what Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 5:1–3. In the first letter, Paul indicates that the day of the Lord could come at any time and will come without warning. The “new teaching” in 2 Thessalonians claims that the day of the Lord cannot come until

other things happen, events that will allow believers to know when Jesus is about to return.

That the Thessalonians were previously alarmed when some members of their church died before the second coming (see 1 Thess. 4:13–18) seems hard to reconcile with the claim here that Paul believed that the end was not yet at hand and that he had taught this to the Thessalonians when he was with them (2 Thess. 2:5). At the very least, some scholars say, if Paul actually believed the teaching about the end times expressed in 2 Thessalonians 2:1–12, he would have responded to the crisis dealt with in 1 Thessalonians differently: he would have told them, “Of course some people are going to die, because the end is not yet at hand!”

Some scholars think that 2 Thessalonians’ overt “claim to authenticity” actually counts against its acceptance as one of Paul’s genuine letters. The author alludes to the possibility that some forged letters from Paul might be circulating (2:2) and then goes out of his way to prove that this one is not a forgery: “I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is the mark in every letter of mine; it is the way I write” (3:17). Some scholars claim that this is exactly the kind of thing that a forger would do in order to pass off a letter as being by Paul. Furthermore, such a claim to authenticity would be anachronistic for a letter actually written by Paul early in his ministry, because we have no reason to believe that anyone was forging letters by Paul at that point. The forgeries came later, when the

controversial missionary had come to be more highly respected within the church and his letters had been accorded some degree of authority.

Reasons for Affirming Pauline Authorship

Above Arguments Are Not Totally Convincing

It is possible that Paul would have repeated much of the content from one letter in a follow-up letter (especially since he seems to think that the Thessalonians need to be reminded of things).

It is possible that his thinking on a subject as mysterious as the end times could have been inconsistent or paradoxical. We note, for example, that the author of Mark's Gospel has no trouble including material that maintains that the end is coming soon and will be unpredictable (13:30–37) alongside material that describes events that must happen first and that may be regarded as signs for knowing the moment is near (13:5–8, 10, 14, 21–29).

It is possible that Paul emphasized different aspects of his beliefs at different times, depending on which pastoral concern needed to be addressed. When comforting grief-stricken people who longed to be reunited with their loved ones, he stressed that the end was coming soon. When dealing with folks who worried that the time may have already come and that they had missed it, he indicated that other things must happen first.

It is possible that Paul in fact did have to worry about people using his name to promote their own ideas even when his status as an apostolic authority in the church was more limited and localized.

Pseudepigraphy in This Instance Is Highly Unlikely

The strong, explicit claim that 2 Thessalonians makes to authenticity (with words in Paul's own handwriting) rules out any consideration of it having been produced pseudepigraphically under honorable conditions (e.g., by disciples who wanted to continue their master's work and humbly give him credit for what he had inspired). In this case, if the letter is not by Paul then it must be regarded as a forgery, offered by someone guilty of perpetrating the very sort of fraud that 3:17 warns against. The pseudepigraphical author would have to be regarded as an unscrupulous hypocrite. It is unlikely that such a person would be motivated to produce a letter that evinces the high moral values of this composition.

The letter was unanimously accepted as an authentic composition of Paul in the early church (from the mid-first century on). It is intrinsically unlikely that all Christians would have been so easily hoodwinked by a letter claiming to be from the first part of Paul's ministry if it had in fact been produced some decades after his death. Church officials were on the lookout for pseudepigraphical writings and in fact rejected dozens of works for which authorship was doubtful; however, no one ever questioned the authenticity of 2 Thessalonians.

One of the letter's central claims is that the day of the Lord will not come until after the "lawless one" perpetrates some sort of abomination in the temple of God (2 Thess. 2:3–4). It seems unlikely that a pseudepigraphical author would have written this after 70, the year when the temple was destroyed; if the letter was written before 70, it might much more easily have been produced during Paul's lifetime, and thus by Paul himself.

Some Sample Views

One proposal is that 2 Thessalonians represents a claim to speak for "the real Paul" on the part of some strand of post-Pauline Christianity that is competing with other strands of Pauline Christianity that may be making similar claims.¹ Another proposal regards both letters as coming from Paul and explains their differences in terms of pastoral responses to diverse crises.² A mediating position holds that the letter was not written by Paul but that it was written to the Thessalonian church, probably by Timothy or one of Paul's other companions.³ A minority position holds that 2 Thessalonians might have been written (by Paul) prior to 1 Thessalonians.⁴

Conclusion

The bottom line is that scholars remain undecided on this issue. Many think it likely that Paul did not write this letter and that he would not even have approved of it, but many others think it more likely that

Paul did write it. Most interpreters will admit that the evidence is not completely compelling either way.

1. See Frank Witt Hughes, *Early Christian Rhetoric and 2 Thessalonians*, JSNTSup 30 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989).
2. See Charles H. Gibling, *The Threat to Faith: An Exegetical and Theological Re-Examination of 2 Thessalonians 2*, AnBib 31 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1967); Colin R. Nicholl, *From Hope to Despair in Thessalonica: Situating 1 and 2 Thessalonians*, SNTSMS 126 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
3. See Karl P. Donfried, "The Theology of 2 Thessalonians," in *The Theology of the Shorter Pauline Letters*, NTT (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 84–87.
4. See Charles A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 37–45.

21.6

What Was the Rumor? (Box 21.1)

The Thessalonians were shaken and alarmed by a rumor that “the day of the Lord is already here” (2 Thess. 2:2). What did they think had happened?

- Did they think that the persecutions that they were experiencing were the “birth pangs” indicating that the second coming was certain to occur within a matter of days (cf. 1 Thess. 5:3)?
- Did they think that Jesus had already come back and was putting together his kingdom somewhere on earth?
- Did they think that something like the “rapture” had occurred and that they had been left behind (cf. 1 Thess. 4:15–17)?
- Did they think that Christ had returned in some mystical sense, perhaps embodied in the spiritual unity of the community?
- Did they think that the “day of the Lord” was something that did not require a literal second coming but, rather, could be realized spiritually through a life of faith that overcomes all difficulties (cf. 1 Cor. 4:8)?

21.7

Who (or What) Was the Restrainer? (Box 21.2)

Second Thessalonians 2:6–7 indicates that the “lawless one” is currently being restrained by someone or something that eventually will be removed. The Thessalonians knew who or what this restrainer was (2:5–6). Interpreters since then have had to guess:

- God or God’s power
- the Holy Spirit
- Satan
- the angel Apollyon (Rev. 9:11)
- the archangel Michael (Jude 1:9; Rev. 12:7)
- the Christian church
- some prominent Christian leader (Paul himself or James of Jerusalem)
- the gentile mission, which had to be completed first (cf. Mark 13:10)
- the Roman Empire and/or the emperor (cf. Rom. 13:1–7)

Such ideas are sometimes combined: 2 Thessalonians 2:6 seems to speak of a restraining force (“what is now restraining him”), while 2:7 seems to speak of a person (“the one who now restrains”).

In the fifth century, Augustine’s comment on 2:6–7 was, “I must admit that the meaning of this completely escapes me” (*The City of*

God 20.19). Modern scholars have fared no better than Augustine in their analysis of this puzzle.

22.0

1 Timothy: Outline of Contents

I. Introduction (1:1–20)

A. Prescript (1:1–2)

B. Purpose of Timothy's present ministry in Ephesus: to combat heretical teaching (1:3–11)

C. Thanksgiving for God's mercy to Paul; an example (1:12–17)

D. Timothy to maintain a good conscience, something rejected by others (1:18–20)

II. Charge to Timothy (2:1–6:19)

A. Prayers for all, especially rulers (2:1–7)

B. Man's worship and woman's (relating to her praiseworthy public image) (2:8–15)

C. Qualifications for office of bishop (3:1–7)

D. Qualifications for deacons (and deaconesses?) (3:8–13)

E. Word to Timothy concerning church (3:14–16)

F. Asceticism of heretics to be counteracted by Timothy's instruction, example, and care of special persons (4:1–5:2)

G. Procedures for enrolling widows; how to deal with too many (5:3–16)

H. Maintaining integrity of office of elder (5:17–25)

I. Behavior of Christian slaves (6:1–2)

J. Deplorable conduct of heretics; special warning against avarice

(6:3–10)

K. Exhortations to Timothy (6:11–16; see also 5:21–25)

L. Word to the wealthy (6:17–19)

III. Conclusion: final warning against teachers of “false knowledge”

(6:20–21)

Courtesy of *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, ed. Mark Allan Powell (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 1049.

22.1

2 Timothy: Outline of Contents

I. Introduction (1:1–7)

A. Prescript (1:1–2)

B. Thankful remembrance for Christian heritage of Paul and Timothy (1:3–7)

II. Exhortations (1:8–4:5)

A. Experience of suffering as authentication of elect (1:8–2:26)

B. Presence of heresy as authentication of prophecy; great value of tradition (3:1–4:5)

III. Conclusion (4:6–22)

A. Personal notes concerning Paul's situation; final instructions (4:6–18)

B. Greetings (4:19–21)

C. Grace, offered on behalf of church (4:22)

Courtesy of *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, ed. Mark Allan Powell (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 1051.

22.2

Titus: Outline of Contents

I. Prescript (1:1–4)

II. Instructions (1:5–3:8a)

A. Concerning elders, and office of bishop (1:5–9)

B. Warning concerning “circumcision party” (1:10–16)

C. Rules for household (2:1–10)

D. Sanctions for instructions (2:11–3:8a)

III. Conclusion (3:8b–15)

A. Titus to avoid “stupid controversies” (3:8b–11)

B. Assignments, greetings, grace (3:12–15)

Courtesy of *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, ed. Mark Allan Powell (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 1055.

22.3

Pastoral Letters in the Revised Common Lectionary

Text	Series	Liturgical Occasion	Calendar Date
1 Tim. 1:12–17	C	Lectionary 24	Sep 11–17
1 Tim. 2:1–7	C	Lectionary 25	Sep 18–24
1 Tim. 6:6–19	C	Lectionary 26	Sep 25–Oct 1
2 Tim. 1:1–14	C	Lectionary 27	Oct 2–8
2 Tim. 2:8–15	C	Lectionary 28	Oct 9–15
2 Tim. 3:14–4:5	C	Lectionary 29	Oct 16–22
2 Tim. 4:6–8, 16–18	C	Lectionary 30	Oct 23–29
Titus 2:11–14	A, B, C	Christmas Eve	Dec 24
Titus 3:4–7	A, B, C	Christmas Day	Dec 25

22.4

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22.5

Church Leaders in the New Testament

Bishops: The Greek word *episkopos* means simply “overseer” and could be used in the secular world to refer to many types of administrators or supervisors. In 1 Peter 2:25, it is used of Christ. See also Acts 20:28; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1–6; Titus 1:7–9.

Deacons: The Greek word *diakonos* means “one who serves” and is often translated “minister” or “servant” in English Bibles. It is used widely in the New Testament and is not always intended to designate a formal office. It is applied to Phoebe (Rom. 16:1), Apollos (1 Cor. 3:5), Tychicus (Eph. 6:21), Epaphras (Col. 1:7), and Paul himself (1 Cor. 3:5; 2 Cor. 3:6; Eph. 3:7). In the book of Acts, the seven men appointed to “wait on tables” (Acts 6:2–5) are usually regarded as deacons. See also Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:8–13.

Elders: The Greek word *presbyteros* can refer to one who is advanced in age or experience. We read of elders in Israel throughout the Old Testament (e.g., Exod. 3:16; 1 Sam. 8:4), and Jewish elders are frequently mentioned in the New Testament Gospels (e.g., Matt. 21:23; Luke 7:3). In the book of Acts, elders are appointed in many Christian churches (Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:2–6, 22–23; 16:4; 20:17; 21:18), and in the book of Revelation,

elders have a privileged position in heaven (Rev. 4:4, 10; 5:5–8, 11, 14; 7:11–13; 11:16; 14:3; 19:4). Elders are never mentioned in any of the undisputed letters of Paul, but see 1 Timothy 4:14; 5:17–19; Titus 1:5–6; James 5:14; 1 Peter 5:1–5.

Widows: We hear of widows who have been enrolled for special service in the church only in 1 Timothy 5:3–16. Paul, however, does encourage all widows to devote themselves to “the affairs of the Lord” rather than remarrying in 1 Corinthians 7:8, 34, 39–40. The church’s commitment to caring for widows is apparent in Acts 6:1; 9:39; James 1:27. See also Luke 2:37.

Others: Paul refers to other varieties of church leadership in Romans 12:8; 1 Corinthians 12:28; Galatians 6:6; 1 Thessalonians 5:12.

Other early Christian writings testify to the development of these offices. Both *1 Clement* (ca. 96) and the *Didache* (ca. 100) mention “bishops” and “deacons” as separate positions, giving the impression of a two-tiered hierarchy. By the time of Ignatius (ca. 110), a three-part structure had developed, according to which “bishops,” “deacons,” and “elders” represented three distinct offices. Ignatius also refers to “the virgins who are called widows” (Ignatius, *To the Smyrnaeans* 13:1). Is this a later development of the tradition: never-married women taking vows of lifelong celibacy?

22.6

1 Timothy 5:3–16—The Office of the Widows (Box 22.6)

The office of widows receives special attention in the First Letter to Timothy (5:3–16). The idea behind this vocation was that widows who had no family members to care for them could be supported financially by the church while devoting themselves to prayer and good works. But two problems seem to have arisen:

- Some church members were taking advantage of the program and abdicating their personal responsibility to care for family members (1 Tim. 5:4, 8).
- Some younger widows apparently were taken into the program and then they dropped out, deciding to remarry.

Thus Timothy is told to limit enrollment in the program to those who are “real widows”—that is, those who have been “left alone” with no one to care for them (1 Tim. 5:3, 5, 16). He is also to limit enrollment to widows over sixty years of age, and to women who have demonstrated a capacity for the life of prayer and good works that are expected of those in the program (5:9–12).

For more on this intriguing office, see Bonnie Bowman Thurston, *The Widows: A Women’s Ministry in the Early Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989).

22.7

Timothy: A Biographical Sketch (Box 22.1)

Timothy, the son of a gentile man and a Jewish woman, lived in the town of Lystra in southeastern Asia Minor; his mother was a believer, but his father was not (Acts 16:1). Timothy embraced the Christian faith, and Paul recruited him as a companion for his second missionary journey, circumcising him so as not to offend the Jews (Acts 16:3). Toward the end of that journey, Paul sent him back to Macedonia to strengthen the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 3:2). Timothy then rejoined Paul in Corinth, bringing him good news about the Thessalonian church (Acts 18:5; 1 Thess. 3:6) and helping him to evangelize the Corinthians (2 Cor. 1:19). Later, he accompanied Paul on his third missionary journey and thus was with Paul during his lengthy stay in Ephesus (Acts 19). Paul sent him once again to Macedonia (Acts 19:22) and repeatedly to Corinth (1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10). Timothy later spent a winter with Paul in Corinth (from which Romans was written; see Rom. 16:21) and then went on to Troas, where Paul spent a week with him on his way to Jerusalem (Acts 20:4–5).

After this we lose track of Timothy. He may have continued ministering in Troas, where Paul's own work had been cut short due to crises in Corinth (2 Cor. 2:12–13). Later on he may have gone to Rome to be of service to Paul during his imprisonment there (see Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 4:10; Philem. 1 [but were these letters written from

Rome?]). He himself may have been imprisoned at some time (see Heb. 13:23), but we have no information as to when or where this would have been.

The two letters addressed to Timothy add only minor details to this portrait: his mother's name was Eunice, and his grandmother, also a believer, was named Lois (2 Tim. 1:5); he was young in comparison to Paul (1 Tim. 4:12; 5:1); he suffered from frequent illnesses (1 Tim. 5:23); and he had received a spiritual gift through prophecy and the laying on of hands (1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6).

In artwork, Timothy is often depicted as holding a rod or bat because, according to one church tradition, he was beaten to death by opponents at the age of eighty.

22.8

Titus: A Biographical Sketch (Box 22.2)

Titus was a gentile Christian, possibly from Antioch, who was brought to Jerusalem by Paul and Barnabas as a sort of test case for the church in deciding whether gentile converts to Christianity needed to be circumcised (Gal. 2:1–3). The extent of his involvement with Paul’s subsequent missionary work is unknown, but Paul did come to regard him as a “partner and co-worker” (2 Cor. 8:23), and he appears to have been with Paul during portions of what is called the third missionary journey.

In the mid-50s Paul sent him from Ephesus to Corinth, carrying a painful letter that Paul had written to that church. He was successful in mediating a reconciliation between Paul and the congregation, and he brought Paul news of this in Macedonia (see 2 Cor. 2:4, 13; 7:6–8, 13–15). Later, Titus would return to the Corinthian church as one of the agents responsible for administering the offering Paul was collecting for Jerusalem (2 Cor. 8:6, 16–18, 23; 9:5; cf. 12:18). We know nothing else for certain, though there are references in the Pastoral Letters to Titus conducting ministry in Dalmatia (2 Tim. 4:10) and in Crete (Titus 1:5).

22.9

Concern for Social Respectability in the Pastoral Letters (Box 22.5)

The Pastoral Letters exhibit special concern for the social respectability of Christians:

- A bishop is to be someone “well thought of by outsiders” (1 Tim. 3:7).
- Slaves are to accept their lot so that “the name of God and the teaching may not be blasphemed” (1 Tim. 6:1).
- Young women are to be submissive to their husbands “so that the word of God may not be discredited” (Titus 2:5).
- Young widows should remarry “so as to give the adversary no occasion to revile us” (1 Tim. 5:14; cf. Titus 2:8).

In general, Christians are to be productive and obedient, good citizens whose lives are free of anything offensive or scandalous (1 Tim. 2:1–3, 9–10; 3:2–13; 2 Tim. 2:22–25; Titus 1:5–8; 2:3–10; 3:1–2, 14). The virtue of “self-control” receives particular emphasis (2 Tim. 1:7; Titus 1:8; 2:5–6, 12). Thus these letters make clear that Christianity is not socially subversive and that the gospel has a certain “civilizing function”: it trains those who would otherwise be “vicious brutes” (Titus 1:12; cf. 3:3) to live in ways that are “self-controlled, upright, and godly” (Titus 2:11–12).

22.10

Women and Ministry in the Pastoral Letters

The Pastoral Letters evince attitudes toward women and toward the role of women in church and society that have been the focus of much discussion.

What the Pastorals Say about Women and Ministry

In general, women are to concentrate on bearing children (1 Tim. 2:15; 5:14), managing their households (1 Tim. 5:14; Titus 2:5), and being submissive to their husbands (1 Tim. 2:11; Titus 2:5). Modesty is a prime virtue for women (1 Tim. 2:9, 15); they should shun such worldly distractions as jewelry, fashionable hairstyles, and expensive clothing (1 Tim. 2:9) and cultivate a life of good works that demonstrate reverence for God (1 Tim. 2:10). Such attention is needed because young women in particular tend to become alienated from Christ by sensual desires (1 Tim. 5:11); they are also prone to becoming idle busybodies and gossips, gadding about from house to house (1 Tim. 5:13). They need to learn to be quiet and to “learn in silence with full submission” (1 Tim. 2:11). In terms of ministry, there is an office in the church for aged widows (1 Tim. 5:9–10); some women may also serve as deacons (1 Tim. 3:11), but women should not be permitted to teach or to have authority over men (1 Tim. 2:12). One reason for this seems to be that women are more likely than men to be flighty or “silly” and to be confused by

their desires (2 Tim. 3:6); they are, at any rate, more easily deceived than men, as has been evident ever since Eve was tricked by the serpent in the garden of Eden (1 Tim. 2:14; cf. Gen. 3:1–7; 2 Cor. 11:3; but see also Rom. 5:12–19, where Eve is not even mentioned).

Reception and Interpretation

Not surprisingly, this theme has been considered problematic by many Christians. It seems sexist and unreasonable, and much of the language employed seems unduly harsh (e.g., 1 Tim. 5:6). The restrictions also seem incompatible with the fact that Paul is elsewhere depicted as having female coworkers (e.g., Prisca/Priscilla in Acts 18:2, 18, 26; cf. Rom. 16:3; 1 Cor. 16:19; 2 Tim. 4:19), and as encouraging respect for women in positions of leadership (e.g., Phoebe in Rom. 16:1–2; Junia in Rom. 16:7).

A few attempts have sought to explain the situation that would give rise to these texts:

- Some scholars argue that gnostic movements in the second century sometimes granted high visibility to female leaders; the Pastoral Letters perhaps represent a backlash against the egalitarianism of women in those heretical communities.¹
- Some think that the harsher comments are specifically directed to wealthy women, the ones who could afford gold and pearls (1 Tim. 2:9) and lives of leisure (1 Tim. 5:6, 13);

these women had become targets of teachers who wanted them as patrons (2 Tim. 3:6–7).²

- Some suggest that the cult of the goddess Artemis, which was prominent in Ephesus (Acts 19:24–41), might account for a Christian bias in that city against women as spiritual leaders.³
- Some think the prohibition against teaching men is directed against “unlearned teachers” (under the assumption that women in this setting were “unlearned”).⁴

Conclusion

Three general views are discernible among Christian interpreters today:

- Many interpreters believe the comments made in the Pastoral Letters regarding women and ministry need to be considered in light of their original social context: they should be read as socially conditioned remarks for a particular venue rather than as timeless truth for every setting.⁵
- Not all interpreters are convinced that such caveats apply. Churches that do not ordain women usually appeal to the Pastoral Letters (especially 1 Tim. 2:12) as justification for the restriction, and many Christians do regard the comments in these letters as indicative of divinely mandated gender roles.⁶

- Some Christians simply reject this teaching of the letters outright, questioning whether teaching that denigrates women should be regarded as the revealed or inspired word of God.

1. See Stevan L. Davies, *The Revolt of the Widows: The Social World of the Apocryphal Acts* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980); Dennis R. McDonald, *The Legend and the Apostle: The Battle for Paul in Story and Canon* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983).
2. See Paul J. Achtemeier, Joel B. Green, and Marianne Meye Thompson, *Introducing the New Testament: Its Literature and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 450.
3. See Sharon Hodgkin Gritz, *Paul, Women Teachers, and the Mother Goddess at Ephesus: A Study of 1 Timothy 2:9–15 in Light of the Religious and Cultural Milieu of the First Century* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1991).
4. See Craig Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives: Marriage and Women's Ministry in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992), 101–32.
5. See Linda L. Belleville, *Women Leaders and the Church: Three Crucial Questions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 162–80; Richard Clark Kroeger and Catherine Clark Kroeger, *I Suffer Not a Woman: Rethinking 1 Timothy 2:11–14 in Light of Ancient Evidence* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1992).
6. See Andreas J. Köstenberger, Thomas R. Schreiner, and H. Scott Baldwin, eds., *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:11–15* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1995).
7. See Linda M. Maloney, *Searching the Scriptures*, vol. 2, *A Feminist Commentary*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 361; Frances Young, *The Theology of the Pastoral Letters*, NTT (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 145–47.

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22.11

Polemic against False Teachers in the Pastoral Letters

All three Pastoral Letters are concerned that false teachers have come into the church, but the letters do not describe or debunk the content of the errant teaching as such. Rather, they attack the teachers themselves. The methods, morals, and motives of those teachers are put on display as examples of what Christians should avoid.

- The problematic teachers are described as “perverted and sinful” (Titus 3:11).
- They are “detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work” (Titus 1:16).
- They are “wicked people . . . [who] will go from bad to worse” (2 Tim. 3:13).
- They understand nothing (1 Tim. 6:4).
- They are “bereft of the truth” (1 Tim. 6:5).
- They are proponents of a “counterfeit faith” that is opposed “to the truth” (2 Tim. 3:8).
- They hold “to the outward form of godliness” while “denying its power” (2 Tim. 3:5).

- They are in “the snare of the devil,” held captive by him to do his will (2 Tim. 2:26).
- Their teaching comes from demons and deceitful spirits (1 Tim. 4:1).

The letters also offer some reflection on how the false teachers came to be the way they are.

- These teachers seem to have lost or ignored the value of conscience (1 Tim. 4:2; Titus 1:15), and people who reject conscience often “have suffered shipwreck in the faith” (1 Tim. 1:19).
- They have pretended to be something they are not; thus they are hypocrites and liars (1 Tim. 4:2), impostors who tried to deceive others and, in the process, ended up deceiving themselves (2 Tim. 3:13; cf. Titus 1:11).
- They have sought to minister in the church with impure motives, such as envy (1 Tim. 6:4) and a desire for sordid financial gain (1 Tim. 6:5; Titus 1:11).
- They are divisive, harboring “a morbid craving for controversy and for disputes about words” (1 Tim. 6:4; cf. 2 Tim. 2:14, 23; Titus 3:9–11).

Such factors have corrupted their minds (1 Tim. 6:5; 2 Tim. 3:8; Titus 1:15), which is why they do not know the truth (1 Tim. 6:4–5).

Thus the Pastoral Letters do not urge church leaders to debate with such persons or even try to convince them that they are wrong (see Titus 1:11, 14; 3:10–11). The situation is not hopeless, but if these false teachers do come to know the truth, it probably will be because they repented of the sins that corrupted them in the first place rather than because they rethought their position in light of superior arguments.

22.12

Titus 1:12—Paul Quotes a Pagan

In the letter to Titus, Paul says, “It was one of them, their very own prophet, who said, ‘Cretans are always liars, vicious brutes, lazy gluttons.’ That testimony is true” (Titus 1:12–13). No text containing these words has survived from antiquity, but Clement of Alexandria, John Chrysostom, and other authorities attributed the line to Epimenides, a seventh- or sixth-century-BCE philosopher-poet.

In the early twentieth century, a ninth-century Syriac commentary on the book of Acts was discovered that contained a full quote from the text of Epimenides, which apparently was available to the author of that work at that time. The context seems to be an error (or “lie”) on the part of Cretans who, by building a tomb for Zeus, failed to recognize that the god was immortal

They fashioned a tomb for you, holy and high one,
Cretans, always liars, evil beasts, idle bellies.
But you are not dead: you live and abide forever,
For in you we live and move and have our being.

Of special note is the fact that this one stanza of ancient poetry is quoted twice in the New Testament! Paul is presented as citing the second line in Titus 1:12, and in Acts 17:28 he is presented as citing the concluding line in a completely different context: “[God] is not far from each one of us. For ‘in him we live and move and have our

being’; as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we too are his offspring’” (Acts 17:27–28).

In this passage, Paul further introduces an additional quotation from pagan poetry: the line “we too are his offspring.” He indicates that this line is something that more one Greek poet has said, and we do possess two texts that contain similar lines:

All the streets and all the market places
of humanity are full of Zeus.
Also full of him are the sea and the harbors,
and everywhere we all have need of Zeus.
For we are also his offspring.

—Aratus of Soli in Cilicia, *Phaenomena* 2–5¹

The beginning of the world was from you,
and with law you rule over all things.
To you all flesh may speak,
for we are your offspring.
Therefore I will lift a hymn to you
and will sing of your power.

—Cleanthes, *Fragment* 537, “Hymn to Zeus”²

Both Aratus and Cleanthes were Stoic philosophers (fourth to third centuries BCE).

1. Quoted in Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey to the New Testament*, 5th ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 362.

2. Quoted in Gundry, *Survey to the New Testament*, 362.

22.13

Authorship of the Pastoral Letters

Arguments for the Letters Being Pseudepigraphical

Scholars who argue that these letters are pseudonymous usually do so with reference to six key points.

The Language and Style Are Not Typical of Paul's Letters

First Timothy and Titus have no thanksgiving in their openings, which is out of character with Paul's letters (except for Galatians, where he seems to have omitted it in anger); likewise, they have no formal closing, other than a brief blessing. Furthermore, the vocabulary of the Pastoral Letters is strikingly different from that of other letters ascribed to Paul. In general, the Pastoral Letters employ a vocabulary closer to that of popular Greek philosophers and ethical teachers, whereas Paul's undisputed letters have more in common with the Septuagint (a Greek translation of the Old Testament).

Curiously, the distinctive language of the Pastoral Letters bears many similarities to the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts, and comparisons to the writings of second-century Christians are even more pronounced. This distinctive vocabulary might be explained as a result of Paul trusting an amanuensis with the task of composing the letters, but Paul uses secretaries for other letters without such noticeable effect. For example, Tertius serves as his amanuensis for

Romans (Rom. 16:22), but the language and style of that letter is wholly compatible with other Pauline letters.

Certain Theological Ideas Are Different

Many scholars believe that numerous ideas are developed in the Pastoral Letters in ways that differ from or even conflict with what is found in letters universally acknowledged as Pauline. Salvation is linked to the epiphany (appearance) of Christ (1 Tim. 3:16; 2 Tim. 1:9–10; Titus 2:11; 3:4), while the cross and resurrection of Christ are virtually ignored (except for 2 Tim. 2:8). The Pastoral Letters speak of Christ in exalted language: Jesus is not just “Lord”; he is “King of kings and Lord of lords” (1 Tim. 6:15) and he is “our great God and Savior” (Titus 2:13).

In another vein, words such as “righteousness” and “faith” are used here in a way that accents the human dynamic (“right behavior,” “correct belief”) rather than an activity of God that inspires trust. And in general terms, the Pastoral Letters seem to betray an increased sense of accommodation with the world. They envision Christianity as making a home for itself in Roman society, achieving social respectability, and settling in for the long haul. This might be at odds with the usual perspective of Paul, who thought that the end of all things was near (1 Cor. 7:29–31; 1 Thess. 4:16–18 [but see 1 Tim. 4:1–5]).

The Description of Church Government Seems Too Developed for Paul's Lifetime

The Pastoral Letters seem to envision a broader and more securely established role for authority figures in the church than we encounter in other letters attributed to Paul. In 1 Timothy and Titus we hear a great deal about bishops, elders, and other officials who seem to be in charge of numerous ecclesiastical functions (1 Tim. 3:1–13; 5:3–22; 2 Tim. 2:2; Titus 1:5–7). We know from later Christian writings (*1 Clement*, the *Didache*, Ignatius) that such offices did develop as the church became more institutionalized, but our usual perception is that things were a bit looser during the time of Paul. The overall picture for Paul's day is one in which all members use their diverse gifts for the benefit of the community (Rom. 12:6–8; 1 Cor. 12:27–28) and reputed leaders are regarded with an element of suspicion (Gal. 2:6).

Of course, Paul's letters do contain some references to church leaders (Rom. 12:8; 1 Thess. 5:12–13), and Paul even mentions “bishops and deacons” in Philippians 1:1 (see EXPLORE 18.11). However, he never appeals to these leaders for help in resolving the various problems that arise within his churches, and this leads many scholars to believe that the offices were not as well developed as they appear to be in the Pastoral Letters.

The Nature of the False Teaching Is Distinctive

All three Pastoral Letters exhibit a concern to stop the spread of false teaching within the church (1 Tim. 1:3–7; 6:3–5; 2 Tim. 2:17–

18; 3:6–9; 4:3–4; Titus 1:9–16). The exact nature of this teaching is unclear, but it seems to have certain points in common with gnosticism, a religious system that posed a serious challenge to Christianity in the second century, but not much before then (see “On the Horizon: Gnosticism” in chap. 1). Some sort of proto-gnostic ideology may have been around earlier, but scholars question whether such thinking would have been prominent in Christian churches at the time of Paul. It seems odd, at least, that these ideas would be regarded as a major threat in the Pastoral Letters but not be treated as a potential problem in other letters attributed to Paul.

The Manner of Dealing with False Teaching Is Not Characteristic of Paul

Usually when Paul believes that a church has been led astray by false teachers, he writes to the church as a whole (see Galatians, 2 Corinthians) rather than to an individual. More to the point, he usually seeks to refute objectionable ideas with cogent arguments, often drawn from Scripture (see, e.g., Rom. 3–6; Gal. 3–4). The Pastoral Letters seem more inclined simply to label ideas as acceptable or unacceptable and then to call on church leaders to preserve what is regarded as sound doctrine and reject what is not (1 Tim. 4:1; 6:20; 2 Tim. 1:13–14; 2:2; 4:2–3; Titus 2:1; 3:9–11). It would be an exaggeration to claim that the Pastoral Letters offer no substantive arguments to refute what is objectionable (see 1 Tim. 1:8; 4:3–5, 7–8; 6:5–10), but they do not engage the opposition in the manner exhibited by Paul in Galatians 3–4 or 2 Corinthians 10–

13. Five times in these letters a formulaic phrase is used: “the saying is sure” (1 Tim. 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; 2 Tim. 2:11; Titus 3:8). This phrase never occurs in any other writings attributed to Paul, and it seems to express a reliance on confessional material that has achieved a certain level of authority within the church.

Historical Circumstances Presumed for the Letters Do Not Find Support Elsewhere

The letters addressed to these individuals presume particular situations in the life of Paul that do not seem to fit with what we know of Paul’s career from his other letters and from the book of Acts:

The letter addressed to Titus presumes that Paul and Titus have been ministering together in Crete but that Paul has left, entrusting Titus to continue the work (1:5). He is now writing to Titus from some unspecified location (possibly Ephesus), and he plans to spend the winter in Nicopolis, where he hopes Titus will be able to join him (3:12). We have no knowledge, however, of Paul ever being in Crete. The only mention of that island elsewhere is found in the book of Acts, when a ship on which Paul is a prisoner sails past Crete on the way to Rome (Acts 27:7–16).

The letter known as 1 Timothy presumes that Paul and Timothy have been ministering together in Ephesus, and that Paul has now left there for Macedonia; he is writing back to Timothy, who is now in charge of the Ephesian church (1:3). At first this seems sensible, because Paul did spend almost three years in Ephesus during his third missionary journey (in the mid-50s), and he did go to

Macedonia from there (Acts 20:1–3). According to Acts, however, Timothy had already left Ephesus by this time (Acts 19:21–22). Paul may have also traveled from Ephesus to Macedonia around the time he wrote 2 Corinthians (see 2 Cor. 1:16; 2:12–13; 7:5–6), but again, Timothy appears to have accompanied him on that trip (2 Cor. 1:1).

The letter known as 2 Timothy presumes that Paul is in prison (1:16; 2:9; 4:16) in Rome (1:17), where he expects to be executed (4:6); he wants Timothy (whose whereabouts are unspecified) to come to him, passing through Troas on the way (4:9, 13). Of the situations proposed for each of the three Pastoral Letters, this one is the most tenable. Paul was indeed imprisoned in Rome and executed there. Some scholars, however, think that some of the letters coauthored by Timothy were written from Rome (Philippians, Colossians, Philemon). If so, Timothy would have already been with Paul during the first part of his Roman imprisonment (before he knew that he was to be executed [cf. Phil. 1:25; Philem. 22 with 2 Tim. 4:6, 16]).

Most scholars are willing to admit that no one of these six points would, on its own, lead to a necessary conclusion that Paul did not write the Pastoral Letters. Each point can be explained in terms that allow for Pauline authorship. Still, the cumulative effect of considering all the points together leads the majority of scholars to posit a likelihood that the letters were written twenty or more years after Paul's death. Thus they would be pseudepigraphical compositions, probably by someone within the Pauline tradition who

wanted to honor his mentor and keep the tradition alive for a new generation.

Arguments against the Letters Being Pseudepigraphical

Scholars who favor Pauline authorship are in a minority, but their numbers have been increasing in recent years. They tend to offer arguments under three headings.

The Apparent Anomalies Can Be Explained

Literary and linguistic differences may be accounted for by a heavier reliance on an amanuensis (or reliance on a different amanuensis) for these letters than for others. Likewise, the letters are directed to individuals rather than to congregations, which may affect their style. Claims that the letters are theologically inconsistent with Paul's thinking or historically incompatible with his biography presume a more systematic and comprehensive account of Paul's life and thought than we actually possess.

The Suggestion of Pseudepigraphy Is Illogical

It seems unlikely that an author producing pseudepigraphical Pauline letters would create letters so obviously different from Paul's known writings. Why would such an author compose letters to individuals when Paul was known for writing letters to churches? Why posit settings for the letters that didn't fit with Paul's known biography? Why not pick more plausible settings mentioned in the book of Acts? Why present Paul as greeting individuals not mentioned anywhere

else (the Pastoral Letters refer to fifteen persons not mentioned in any other New Testament writing)?

The Decision in Favor of Pseudepigraphy May Be Ideologically Driven

Scholars who favor Pauline authorship sometimes claim that allegations of pseudepigraphy for these letters are fueled by ideological resistance to their content. Early on, the scholars who said that these letters were pseudepigraphical often were Protestants who saw the positive appraisal of church hierarchies in these letters as a step away from the pure gospel toward “early catholicism.” More recently, scholars who object to the problematic nature of certain passages in the letters (e.g., the silencing of women in 1 Tim. 2:8–15) are said to favor pseudepigraphy under a tacit assumption that this renders the letters less reliable or authoritative.

Compromise Proposals

Finally, two ideas that present something of a compromise with regard to Pauline authorship of the Pastoral Letters.

Expansions of Personal Notes

Some scholars have suggested that although the Pastoral Letters as we have them are pseudepigraphical, they may be expansions of personal notes that Paul actually did write to his colleagues. This could explain some of the personal touches in the letters (e.g., 1 Tim. 1:18–20; 3:14–15; 2 Tim. 1:16–18; 4:9–21; Titus 3:12–15), passages that do not otherwise seem to serve much purpose.

2 Timothy as Authentic

A recent trend in scholarship has sought to separate 2 Timothy from the other two Pastoral Letters and regard it alone as an authentic Pauline composition. Many of the points raised above in support of pseudepigraphy actually apply to 1 Timothy or Titus but not to 2 Timothy. Thus some scholars maintain that 2 Timothy is judged to be pseudepigraphical only because it suffers from “suspicion by association.” The usual logic has been that if the three letters come from the same author, and if 1 Timothy and Titus are pseudepigraphical, then 2 Timothy must be pseudepigraphical as well.

An alternative proposal now contends that Paul could have written 2 Timothy, and then some pseudonymous author could have used 2 Timothy as his model or template to create the other two letters. This would account for the similarities between 2 Timothy and the other two pseudepigraphical letters while allowing the least problematic of the three Pastoral Letters to be regarded as an authentic letter of Paul.

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“Gaps in the Record” Theory

Johnson, Luke Timothy. *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*.

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“Second Career” Theory

These works argue that the Pastoral Letters are not pseudepigraphical. They were all composed after the usually accepted date for Paul’s death, because the apostle was released from prison and had a second career as a missionary not reported in Acts.

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22.14

Did Paul Write the Pastorals? Why Doubt It? (Box 22.3)

For these reasons, some scholars do not think that Paul wrote the Pastoral Letters:

- The language and style are not typical of Paul's letters.
- Certain theological ideas are different from what Paul expresses elsewhere.
- The description of church government seems too developed for Paul's lifetime.
- The teaching opposed in these letters is not something that Paul deals with elsewhere.
- The manner of dealing with false teaching is not characteristic of Paul.
- Historical circumstances presumed for the letters do not find support elsewhere.

All of these points, however, are disputed, and many scholars believe that Paul did write the Pastoral Letters.

22.15

The Distinctive Vocabulary of the Pastoral Letters

The Pastoral Letters use about nine hundred vocabulary words.

Scholars compare these with the vocabulary of other letters attributed to Paul.

Many distinctive words. Over one-third of the words used in these letters do not occur in any other New Testament writing attributed to Paul. Two-thirds of these distinctive words occur in the writings of second-century Christians.

Absence of typical words. Many words used regularly in Paul's other letters are not used here, including numerous characteristic words (conjunctions, particles, adverbs) that Paul tends to use regardless of topic or circumstance.

Words with different meanings. Some important words found in both the Pastoral Letters and Paul's undisputed writings seem to be used differently. Examples:

- Paul uses the word "righteousness" to mean "being in a right relationship with God" (Rom. 5:17; 10:3–4; Gal. 3:21); in the Pastoral Letters it means "being a morally upright person" (1 Tim. 6:11; 2 Tim. 2:22; 3:16; Titus 1:8).
- Paul uses the word "faith" to mean "trust in Jesus Christ" (Rom. 1:16; 2 Cor. 5:7; Gal. 2:20); in the Pastoral Letters it

means “Christian doctrine” (1 Tim. 1:19; 3:9; 4:1; 2 Tim. 3:8; 4:7; Titus 1:13).

- Paul uses the word “common” to mean “unclean” (Rom. 14:14); in the Pastoral Letters it means “shared” (Titus 1:4).

22.16

Proposed Historical Situations for the Pastoral Letters (Box 22.4)

	Titus	1 Timothy	2 Timothy
If there are gaps in our record of Paul's career	by Paul from Ephesus (?) to Titus in Crete, ca. 52–56	by Paul from Macedonia to Timothy in Ephesus, ca. 52–56	by Paul from prison in Rome to Timothy, ca. 60–64
If Paul had a "second career"	same as above but ca. 63–66	same as above but ca. 63–66	same as above but ca. 65–67
If all three letters are by the same pseudonymous author	by an unknown admirer of Paul from an unknown location to Christians in general, late first or early second century		
If the letters are expansions of Pauline notes	brief personal references in all three letters, same as first row above; bulk of all three letters, same as third row above		
If 2 Timothy was written first and by a different author	by admirer of Paul with a copy of 2 Timothy from an unknown location to Christians in general, late first or early second century		same as first row above, or written by Pauline admirer shortly after his death

22.17

Genre of the Pastoral Letters

What sort of letters are these? New Testament scholar Luke Timothy Johnson has challenged traditional notions.

1 Timothy and Titus

These two letters often have been viewed as representing a literary form in between that of a traditional personal letter and a more formal handbook on church order (such as the *Didache*, which appeared around the end of the first century). Johnson suggests, rather, that their form is adapted from a type of royal correspondence called *mandata principis*—a public document from a ruler to an appointed official spelling out the office’s responsibilities and authorizing the occupant to fulfill them.

2 Timothy

This letter often has been thought to embody the popular format of a “last testament” or “farewell speech,” in which inspiring words, along with various exhortations and warnings, were pseudonymously attributed to some revered figure from the past (see Gen. 49; Deut. 33; Josh. 23–24; 2 Sam. 23:1–7; 1 Chron. 28–29; John 14–17; Acts 20:17–38). Johnson suggests that 2 Timothy has the form of a “personal parenetic letter,” an actual letter that seeks to exhort the

recipient by pointing out good and bad examples of what is to be commended.

See Luke Timothy Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, AB 35A (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 2000), 137–42, 320–24.

22.18

What Was the False Teaching Opposed by the Pastoral Letters?

All three Pastoral Letters exhibit concern to correct false teaching in the church (1 Tim. 1:3–7; 4:1–3, 7; 6:3–5; 2 Tim. 2:14, 16–18, 25–26; 3:6–9; 4:3–4; Titus 1:9–16). Who are the false teachers, and what do they teach?

Second Timothy gives us the most specific information: two men, Hymenaeus and Philetus, are teaching that “the resurrection has already taken place” (2 Tim. 2:17–18; cf. 1 Cor. 15:12; 2 Thess. 2:1–3); a third man, Alexander the coppersmith, has strongly opposed Paul’s teaching and caused him “great harm” (2 Tim. 4:14). We hear of a Hymenaeus and an Alexander (same one?) in 1 Timothy also (1 Tim. 1:20; cf. Acts 19:33). Still, the problems that have arisen may go beyond specific concerns attributable to these individuals. There are references to “myths” (1 Tim. 1:4; 4:7; 2 Tim. 4:4; Titus 1:14), “genealogies” (1 Tim. 1:4; Titus 3:9), and “quarrels about the law” (Titus 3:9; cf. 1 Tim. 1:7–11; 4:3–4). In one instance we hear of people who “forbid marriage and demand abstinence from foods” (1 Tim. 4:3).

One possibility is that some form of Jewish asceticism was being touted in Christian communities: believers were being encouraged by Jews or Jewish Christians (see 1 Tim. 1:7; Titus 1:10, 14) to keep

ritual purity laws and, perhaps, to go beyond these by remaining celibate and making other strict lifestyle choices. The Pastoral Letters respond by insisting that the law is for those who don't know the gospel (1 Tim. 1:8–11), that all things created by God are good and may be received with thanksgiving (1 Tim. 4:4), and that “to the pure all things are pure” (Titus 1:15).

Many scholars would go further: the ideas resisted in the Pastoral Letters bear resemblance to second-century gnosticism. The First Letter to Timothy refers specifically to people who profess “what is falsely called knowledge” (1 Tim. 6:20; cf. Titus 1:16a), and gnostics claimed to be the recipients of secret, revealed knowledge (the Greek word *gnōsis*, from which “gnosticism” takes its name, means “knowledge”). Gnostics also despised material aspects of reality, often insisting on extreme asceticism: the line “to the pure all things are pure” (Titus 1:15) would have made an excellent anti-gnostic slogan. Many gnostic groups kept track of elaborate genealogies for various divine beings, tracing angels, spirits, and the gods of other religions back to some transcendent, universal deity. Thus the false teaching opposed in the Pastoral Letters may have involved a mixture of ideas, some drawn from Jewish circles and others drawn from what would later be known as gnosticism.

22.19

Married Only Once? (Box 22.7)

The letter of 1 Timothy indicates that bishops (3:2) and deacons (3:12) are to be married only once (or, literally, to be “the husband of one wife”). What does this mean? Four suggestions:

- They are not to practice polygamy. This seems to be obvious, but perhaps it needed to be stated, given converts from many cultures.
- They are to practice fidelity, fulfilling the role of husband only for the woman to whom they are actually married. Again, this seems to be an obvious expectation, though no doubt an important one.

They are not to remarry after being divorced. This seems consistent with Paul’s teaching elsewhere (1 Cor. 7:10–11; cf. Mark 10:11–12).

- They are not to remarry after being widowed. This seems stricter than Paul’s usual policy (Rom. 7:1–3; 1 Cor. 7:39). Still, Paul does say elsewhere that it is best not to remarry (1 Cor. 7:8, 32–35, 40), and the bishops and deacons may be expected to model ideal behavior beyond what would be requirements for all.

Most scholars assume that at least the first two ideas would be included in what is intended here; the third and/or fourth ideas might be intended as well.

22.20

Household Tables in the Pastoral Epistles and Elsewhere in the New Testament

The New Testament letters contains several *Haustafeln* (“household tables”), a literary form that was common in the Greco-Roman world. Here are three of the best-known examples. See also 1 Timothy 2:8–15; 5:1–2; 6:1–2; Titus 2:1–10. Also see two letters by early Christian leaders that are not found in the New Testament: *1 Clement* 1:3; 21:6–9; Polycarp, *To the Philippians* 4:1–6:2).

Ephesians 5:21–6:9

5:21 Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.

22 Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord.

23 For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior. **24** Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands.

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, **26** in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, **27** so as to present the church to himself in splendor, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind—yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish. **28** In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. **29** For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, **30** because we are members of his body. **31** “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” **32** This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church. **33** Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband.

6:1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

2 “Honor your father and mother”—this is the first commandment with a promise: **3** “so that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.”

4 And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

5 Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, in

singleness of heart, as you obey Christ; **6** not only while being watched, and in order to please them, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. **7** Render service with enthusiasm, as to the Lord and not to men and women, **8** knowing that whatever good we do, we will receive the same again from the Lord, whether we are slaves or free.

9 And, masters, do the same to them. Stop threatening them, for you know that both of you have the same Master in heaven, and with him there is no partiality.

Colossians 3:18–4:1

3:18 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. **19** Husbands, love your wives and never treat them harshly.

20 Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is your acceptable duty in the Lord. **21** Fathers, do not provoke your children, or they may lose heart. **22** Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything, not only while being watched and in order to please them, but wholeheartedly, fearing the Lord.

23 Whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord and not for your masters, **24** since you know that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you serve the Lord Christ. **25** For the wrongdoer will be paid back for whatever wrong has been done, and there is no partiality. **4:1** Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, for you know that you also have a Master in heaven.

1 Peter 3:1–7

3:1 Wives, in the same way, accept the authority of your husbands, so that, even if some of them do not obey the word, they may be won over without a word by their wives' conduct, **2** when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. **3** Do not adorn yourselves outwardly by braiding your hair, and by wearing gold ornaments or fine clothing; **4** rather, let your adornment be the inner self with the lasting beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in God's sight. **5** It was in this way long ago that the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves by accepting the authority of their husbands. **6** Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham and called him lord. You have become her daughters as long as you do what is good and never let fears alarm you.

7 Husbands, in the same way, show consideration for your wives in your life together, paying honor to the woman as the weaker sex, since they too are also heirs of the gracious gift of life—so that nothing may hinder your prayers.

22.21

1 Timothy 6:10—Root of All Evil

First Timothy 6:10 presents one of the best-known dictums of the Bible: “the love of money is the root of all evil” (KJV).

The NRSV tones down the declaration considerably: “the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.” Nevertheless, the traditional (and probably more accurate, though hyperbolic) translation persists at a popular level.

Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales* (1478): This medieval masterpiece features one story (“The Pardoner’s Tale”) in which the main character boasts that his motto is *radix malorum est cupiditas*.

Readers were expected to know enough Latin to recognize the direct citation of 1 Timothy 6:10—“Love of money is the root of all evil.”

The O’Jays, “For the Love of Money” (1973): The title of this soul classic clearly derives from 1 Timothy 6:10. The song is best known for its melodic repetition of a single line: “Money, money, money, money, money . . .” The verses describe all the negative effects that a “love of money” can bring, including stealing from one’s mother or robbing one’s brother. But then the bridge drops the words “love of” to declare simply, “I know money is the root of all evil.”

Pink Floyd, “Money” (1973): The same year that the O’Jays scored a huge hit with their song “For the Love of Money,” the progressive rock band Pink Floyd released its iconic album *Dark Side of the*

Moon, which included what would become the band's best-known song, "Money." Again, this song was based on 1 Timothy 6:10. It noted with irony that some people (Christians?) like to say, "Money is the root of all evil" but "you never see them giving it away."

In another book, I commented on the song:

It's a fun song, but there are two things wrong with the lyrics.

First, informed religious people (those who know their Bibles) realize that it is the *love* of money rather than money itself that is the root of evil. And, second, people often do give it away.

Religious people, and, for that matter, many non-religious people, give away vast amounts of money every day, week, month, and year. They sometimes do it anonymously and they often do it sacrificially, in ways that they cannot possibly receive anything in return. They just give their money away, sometimes without even expecting any acknowledgment or appreciation for what they have done.

1. Mark Allan Powell, *Giving to God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 129–30.

22.22

1 Timothy 5:17–22—Qualified Elders

“Lycidas” was one of the earliest poems written by John Milton, who would ultimately be famous for *Paradise Lost*. Milton composed the poem in 1637 as a tribute to a friend who had perished at sea. In the first portion of the long work, Milton asks why the powers that be were not more attentive to prevent the tragedy. Saint Peter responds (in lines 108–131) by essentially changing the subject, complaining about all the unworthy shepherds that now lead God’s flock:

Blind mouths! that scarce themselves know how to hold
A sheep-hook, or have learned aught else the least
That to the faithful herdman’s art belongs!
What recks it them? What need they? They are sped;
And when they list, their lean and flashy songs
Grate on their scrannel pipes of wretched straw;
The hungry sheep look up, and are not fed,
But swoll’n with wind, and the rank mist they draw,
Rot inwardly, and foul contagion spread:
Besides what the grim wolf with privy paw
Daily devours apace, and nothing said;
But that two-handed engine at the door
Stands ready to smite once, and smite no more.

A similar notion of unworthy shepherds (incompetent and/or uncaring religious leaders) may be found in Ezekiel 34:1–19 and in such New Testament texts as John 10:12–13.

The Pastoral Letters aim to prevent such poor leadership by emphasizing the character requirements of those who would be bishops, deacons, or elders in the church and by imploring those with authority not to be too hasty in empowering people (1 Tim. 5:22).

23.0

Philemon: Outline of Contents

I. Letter opening (1–3)

II. Prayer (4–7)

III. Appeal concerning Onesimus (8–22)

A. Return of Onesimus (8–14)

B. Appeal on Onesimus's behalf (15–22)

IV. Letter closing (23–25)

Courtesy of *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, ed. Mark Allan Powell (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 792.

23.1

Philemon in the Revised Common Lectionary

Text	Series	Liturgical Occasion	Calendar Date
1-21	C	Lectionary 23	Sept. 4-10

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23.3

An All-Star Cast (Box 23.1)

The brief letter to Philemon features cameo appearances by some very big names. All the folks who send greetings in verses 23–24 are mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament.

- **Epaphras** (Col. 1:7; 4:12): the missionary who evangelized Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis.
- **Mark** (Acts 12:12, 25; 15:37–39; Col. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:11; possibly 1 Pet. 5:13): also known as John Mark, a relative of Barnabas. Paul has troubles with him in Acts, but letters ascribed to Paul indicate that they are on good terms at a later point in his ministry; he is identified in church tradition as the author of the Gospel of Mark.
- **Aristarchus** (Acts 19:29; 20:4; 27:2; Col. 4:10): from Thessalonica, a long-time companion of Paul who was sometimes imprisoned with him.
- **Demas** (Col. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:10): a sometime companion of Paul who, according to 2 Timothy, later deserted him.
- **Luke** (Col. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:11; and possibly all of the “we passages” in Acts 16:10–17; 20:5–15; 21:1–18; 27:1–28:16): known as the “beloved physician.” Luke is traditionally identified as the author of the Gospel of Luke and the book of

Acts and as a companion of Paul on portions of his first and third missionary journeys and his voyage to Rome.

- **Timothy** (Acts 16:1–3; 17:14–15; 18:5; 19:22; 20:4; Rom. 16:21; 1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10; 2 Cor. 1:1, 19; Phil. 1:1; 2:19; Col. 1:1; 1 Thess. 1:1; 3:2, 6; 2 Thess. 1:1; 1 Tim. 1:2, 18; 6:20; 2 Tim. 1:2): Paul’s cowriter.

23.4

Colossians and Philemon (Box 19.3)

Similarities

- Both Colossians and Philemon are said to be written from prison (Col. 4:3, 18; cf. 1:24; Philem. 9–10, 13).
- Both are said to be coauthored by Paul and Timothy (Col. 1:1; Philem. 1).
- Both letters mention many of the same individuals: Archippus (Col. 4:17; Philem. 2), Onesimus (Col. 4:9; Philem. 10), Epaphras (Col. 1:7; 4:12–13; Philem. 23), Mark (Col. 4:10; Philem. 24), Aristarchus (Col. 4:10; Philem. 24), Demas (Col. 4:14; Philem. 24), and Luke (Col. 4:14; Philem. 24).

Differences

- Philemon indicates that Epaphras is in prison with Paul, and Aristarchus is not (23–24); Colossians gives the impression that it is the other way around (4:10, 12).
- Colossians makes no mention of an impending visit from Paul, while Philemon indicates that Paul hopes to come to visit soon (22).

23.5

Paul in Prison

What was prison like in the days of Paul? The purpose of imprisonment in the Roman world was neither reform nor punishment; it was simply a way to confine those awaiting judgment. Prisoners were held prior to trial; once a verdict was rendered, they might be executed, beaten, or sent into exile, but normally they would not be sentenced to more time in captivity.

In terms of physical accommodations, most prison cells were basically dungeons—dark, dank facilities where people could be kept captive, often in chains, until the authorities were ready to deal with them. Sometimes, however, respectable individuals could be held under a form of “house arrest,” guarded by soldiers but allowed a relative measure of comfort and freedom. According to the book of Acts, Paul experienced both the best (28:16, 30–31) and the worst (16:23–24) of these possible forms of captivity at different points in his career (cf. 2 Cor. 11:23).

In Philippians, Paul says that he is “in chains” (1:7, 13, 14, 17; the Greek word *desmos*, translated “imprisonment” in many English Bibles, actually means “chain”). Is he literally in chains, or does he mean that in a metaphorical sense? Many interpreters think that his ability to converse with his colleagues, receive gifts, and dictate this letter implies something closer to house arrest. Whatever the

conditions, imprisonment always brought social disgrace, casting aspersions on the prisoner's reputation and generating a significant loss of honor. Paul tries to turn this factor to his own ironic advantage: he will not be put to shame if his own humiliation results in the exaltation of Christ (1:20).

The New Testament contains four other letters that indicate they were written by Paul from prison: Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, and 2 Timothy. Together with Philippians, the five books are sometimes called the "captivity epistles" or the "prison letters."

23.6

Prison Conditions in the Roman World

Types of Imprisonment

Although Ezra 7:26 lists imprisonment as one of several recognized forms of legal punishment, there are no clear references to imprisonment being imposed as a legal penalty in the New Testament. This is in keeping with Roman policies, which did not view the purpose of imprisonment as reform or punishment; imprisonment was simply a means to hold on to those awaiting judgment. Prisoners were held *before* trial; once a verdict was rendered, they might be executed, beaten, or sent into exile, but they would not normally be sentenced to more time in prison.

The New Testament does offer many examples of such pretrial imprisonment: Acts 4:3; 12:3–4; 16:23–24; 23:35; Philippians 1:7–26. The binding or chaining of Jesus before he was brought to Pilate may also reflect some sort of formal arrest procedures (Matt. 27:2; Mark 15:1). Paul's imprisoning of Christians (Acts 8:3) probably refers to his handing them over to the custody of synagogue authorities who would then administer the penalty provided for in Israel's law: a flogging of up to forty lashes (Deut. 25:1–3; 2 Cor. 11:24; Acts 22:19). Pretrial retention, however, could be easily abused and become, in effect, a means of punishment. This appears to have been the case with John the Baptist, for whom no trial was

scheduled (Mark 6:17–20), and with Paul, who was held without trial for two years in Caesarea (allegedly because the governor wanted a bribe to release him, or wanted to appease the Jews whom Paul had offended, see Acts 24:26–27). Debtors unable to pay their creditors were also imprisoned, sometimes in special debtors' prisons, until their debts were paid. Luke 12:58–59 makes precise reference to the “officers” who in Roman times had charge of such prisons (see also Matt. 5:25; 18:30).

Prison Conditions

Conditions in ancient prisons were often harsh. Most prisoners wore chains; their feet might be shackled, their hands manacled or even attached to their neck by another chain, and their movements further restricted by a chain fastened to a post. The existence of laws prohibiting chains that were too short or too restrictive indicates that such practices were employed often enough to merit regulation. The very word “chains” became a synonym for imprisonment. Some prisoners were also kept in wooden stocks, devices to restrain the feet, hands, or even the neck of an individual (see Acts 16:24).

Prisons were often very dark (see Isa. 42:7); the inner area of the prison mentioned in Acts 16:24 was probably without windows.

Although solitary confinement was known, prisoners generally were kept grouped together, accused and condemned, men and women alike. Overcrowding was not infrequent (Isa. 24:22). Prisons often had poor air circulation, a lack of hygienic facilities, rats and vermin,

and food of poor quality. Unscrupulous guards might at times use the withholding of food or even outright torture to extort money from prisoners or their relatives.

Although various rulers, especially in Roman imperial times, struggled to enact reforms or prevent the most severe abuses, the quality of prison life largely remained the responsibility of local officials, and conditions varied considerably from place to place. Somewhat ominously, Hebrews 13:3 speaks of “those who are in prison” in parallel with “those who are being tortured”; the two groups are apparently assumed to be the same.

Respectable individuals were sometimes accorded a form of “house arrest,” guarded by soldiers but allowed a relative measure of comfort and freedom. They could, for example, receive visitors and transact business while waiting for their case to come to court or be resolved. According to the book of Acts, something of this nature was the situation Paul experienced in Rome (28:16, 30–31). Paul, however, indicates in 2 Corinthians 11:23 that he has been imprisoned multiple times (cf. 2 Cor. 6:5), and that letter was written prior to his imprisonments in Jerusalem, Caesarea, and Rome, as reported in Acts 22–28. The exact circumstances or longevity of those imprisonments are difficult to determine. In Philippians 1:7, 13, Paul says that he is “in chains” (NRSV, “imprisonment”) but it is not known whether he means that literally or in a metaphorical sense (as

the RSV assumes). Elsewhere, 2 Timothy 2:9 presents Paul as complaining that he has been “chained like a criminal.”

Whatever the conditions, imprisonment always brought social disgrace, casting aspersions on the person’s reputation and generating a significant loss of honor. This is clearly reflected in 2 Timothy 1:16, where Onesiphorus is singled out for praise as one who was not ashamed of Paul’s chain. In Philippians, Paul tries to turn the humiliation factor to his own ironic advantage: he will not truly be put to shame if his personal humiliation results in the exaltation of Christ (1:20). Likewise, 2 Timothy 2:9 affirms that, even if Paul is chained, the word of God is not.

All told, five New Testament letters are said to have been written from prison: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 2 Timothy, and Philemon. All of these are attributed to Paul; they are sometimes called the “captivity letters” and treated as a group.

23.7

New Testament References to Slaves and Slavery

Literal References to Slavery

- On two occasions, Jesus heals a slave (Matt. 8:5–13; Luke 22:50–51).
- Paul casts a demon out of a slave (Acts 16:16–17).
- Slaves have equal status before God (1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11; Rev. 6:15; 13:16; 19:18).
- Instructions are given regarding how slaves should behave and how their masters should treat them (Eph. 6:5–9; Col. 3:22–4:1; 1 Tim. 6:1–2; Titus 2:9–10; 1 Pet. 2:18–21).
- Advice is given concerning whether slaves should seek their freedom (1 Cor. 7:20–24).
- There is condemnation of slave traders (1 Tim. 1:10; Rev. 18:13).
- Paul writes a letter in regard to his return of a runaway slave to the owner (Philemon).

Metaphorical References to Slavery

- Jesus tells parables in which slaves are characters (Matt. 13:24–30; 18:23–35; 22:1–13; 24:45–51; 25:14–30; Mark 12:1–9; 13:34–36; Luke 12:37–48).

- Jesus uses slavery as a metaphor for discipleship (Matt. 6:24; 10:24–25; Mark 10:42–44; Luke 17:7–10; cf. John 8:31–36).
- Paul uses slavery as a metaphor for devotion to others (1 Cor. 9:19; 2 Cor. 4:5; Gal. 5:13; Phil. 2:7).
- Slavery can be a metaphor for the controlling influences over one's life (Rom. 6:16–20; 7:6, 14, 25; 8:15; 2 Cor. 11:20; Titus 2:3; 3:3; 2 Pet. 2:19; cf. Matt. 6:24).
- Slavery can be a more general symbol for a negative spiritual condition, to be contrasted with freedom in Christ (Gal. 4:1–7; 4:22–5:1; Heb. 2:15).

23.8

Slavery in the Roman World (Box 23.2)

The institution of slavery was deeply ingrained in Roman society. Roman conquests often led to the enslavement of resident populations, and slave hunters captured victims in provinces not yet overtaken by Rome (cf. 1 Tim. 1:10; Rev. 18:13). Individuals could be sentenced to slavery as punishment for various offenses, and entire families were sold into slavery when someone defaulted on a debt. Since children born to slaves were automatically slaves themselves, the passage of generations guaranteed growth of a large slave population. By the time of Paul, between one-fourth and one-third of all people in the empire were slaves.

The life and condition of slaves seems to have varied enormously. Social decorum encouraged humane treatment, and the extreme abuse or killing of slaves was prohibited by law. Still, the welfare of slaves generally depended on the disposition of their masters. In some cases—notably, for slaves who worked in mines or rowed the oars of galley ships—the conditions of life were appalling. In other instances, however, slaves were given an education and provided with a lifestyle that they probably would not have been able to attain on their own. Indeed, many persons willingly sold themselves into slavery in exchange for being taught a trade or obtaining employment that would improve their lot in life.

Slavery was not always permanent. In some cases, slaves were paid a wage and allowed to purchase their freedom after a period of time; in other cases, slaves were automatically freed when they reached the age of thirty. Nevertheless, slaves had few legal rights. They could be beaten at the discretion of their master, they could not legally marry, and any children they produced were the property of their master (cf. Matt. 18:25, 34; 24:48–51; 25:30). They had virtually no autonomy—no ability to make decisions regarding their own lives or destinies—and in a world that valued honor above all else, they occupied the bottom tier of the social pyramid. A slave was a person with no honor—a person who literally lived in disgrace.

23.9

Sanctuary for a Runaway Slave (Box 23.3)

A letter from Pliny the Younger, written in the late first century, offers an appeal to a certain Sabinianus on behalf of a runaway servant. It makes for an interesting comparison to Paul's letter to Philemon, written on behalf of Onesimus.

To Sabinianus. Your freedman, whom you lately mentioned as having displeased you, has been with me; he threw himself at my feet and clung there with as much submission as he could have done at yours. He earnestly requested me with many tears, and even with the eloquence of silent sorrow, to intercede for him; in short, he convinced me by his whole behavior, that he sincerely repents of his fault. And I am persuaded he is thoroughly reformed, because he seems entirely sensible of his delinquency. I know you are angry with him, and I know too, it is not without reason; but clemency can never exert itself with more applause, than when [the cause for resentment is most just]. You once had an affection for this man, and, I hope, will have again: in the meanwhile, let me only prevail with you to pardon him. If he should incur your displeasure hereafter, you will have so much the stronger plea in excuse for your anger, as you show yourself more exorable to him now. Allow something to his youth, to his tears, and to your own natural mildness of temper: do not make him uneasy any longer, and I will add too, do not make yourself so; for a man of your benevolence of heart cannot be

angry without feeling great uneasiness. I am afraid, were I to join my entreaties with his, I should seem rather to compel, than request you to forgive him. Yet I will not scruple to do it; and so much the more fully and freely as I have very sharply and severely reprov'd him, positively threatening never to interpose again in his behalf. But though it was proper to say this to him, in order to make him more fearful of offending, I do not say it to you. I may, perhaps, again have occasion to entreat you upon his account, and again obtain your forgiveness; supposing, I mean, his error should be such as may become me to intercede for, and you to pardon. Farewell.

Pliny (the Younger), *Letters*, 2 vols., trans. William Melmoth, revised by W. M. L. Hutchinson, Loeb Classical Library (London: Heinemann, 1915), 2:166–67.

23.10

Where Was Paul When He Wrote to Philemon?

We know that Paul wrote to Philemon from prison (see Philem. 1, 9, 23), but he appears to have been in prison many times and in many places (2 Cor. 6:5; 11:23). Of course, some of his multiple imprisonments may have been overnight lockups, such as those reported in Acts at Philippi (Acts 16:23–39) and Jerusalem (Acts 23:10–31). He would not have had time for crafting letters on those occasions.

Most scholars believe that Paul was in prison for a considerable time in three locations:

- **Ephesus** (ca. 54–55). The New Testament never actually mentions an imprisonment of Paul in Ephesus, but Paul does say that he experienced ordeals there (1 Cor. 15:32; 2 Cor. 1:8–9), and it seems likely that these included imprisonment.
- **Caesarea** (ca. 58–60). The book of Acts reports that Paul was in prison in Caesarea for what appears to be a two-year period (Acts 23:33–26:32).
- **Rome** (early 60s). The book of Acts also says that Paul was in prison in Rome (Acts 28:16, 30).

A majority of scholars think that Paul writes to Philemon from either Ephesus or Rome. The decision between these two locations (and

dates) usually is related to another decision about a completely different matter: the question of whether Paul wrote the letter to the Colossians.

Philemon and Colossians have many similarities (e.g., they name many of the same people, including Archippus and Onesimus).

Scholars generally conclude that these similarities must be explained in one of two ways: either (1) Paul wrote the letter to the Colossians around the same time that he wrote Philemon and under similar circumstances, or (2) someone else had a copy of Paul's letter to Philemon and borrowed the personal references to make a pseudonymous letter to the Colossians appear to be an authentic Pauline composition.

The Three Possibilities

Let's take the last possibility first. If Paul did not write Colossians, then we may consider the letter to Philemon on its own terms, without any reference to what is contained in Colossians. Where is Paul? Ephesus seems to be the most likely location, because it is a much shorter distance from Colossae; Onesimus could have made his way to Ephesus much more easily than to Rome. In addition, Paul's request to Philemon to have a guest room ready for him in Colossae when he is released from prison (Philem. 22) would make more sense if he were only 110 miles away.

But what if Paul did write Colossians? That would complicate matters because the ideas expressed in that letter are more developed than

what we find in other letters of Paul. Most scholars who think that Paul wrote Colossians assume that he did so very late in life (otherwise, why wouldn't some of those ideas pop up in other letters, ones written later than Colossians?). If Colossians has to be regarded as one of Paul's last letters, and if Philemon was written at the same time as Colossians, then both Philemon and Colossians probably should be viewed as products of the Roman imprisonment rather than the Ephesian one.

In support of this position, scholars also note that some of the persons named in Philemon (and Colossians) are associated with Rome in other New Testament writings: Mark (if it is the same Mark) is associated with Rome in 1 Peter 5:13; Luke is associated with Rome in 2 Timothy 4:11 (and in Acts 28:16 if Luke is the author of Acts); Demas is associated with Rome in 2 Timothy 4:10; Aristarchus is said to have been with Paul in both Ephesus (Acts 19:29) and Rome (Acts 27:2).

A few scholars have suggested the "compromise" solution that Paul is writing to Philemon from Caesarea, but this has not gone over well: Caesarea is also a long way from Colossae, and the imprisonment there does not allow for Colossians to be produced at the end of Paul's life.

Conclusion

Most scholars who believe that Paul wrote Colossians think that both Philemon and Colossians were written in Rome around 60–61 and

then carried to Colossae by Tychicus (Col. 4:7–8), accompanied by Onesimus (Col. 4:9).

Most scholars who believe that Paul did not write Colossians usually think that he wrote Philemon from Ephesus around 54–55 and that someone else later used Philemon as a guide to create a pseudonymous letter to the church at Colossae.

23.11

Paul's Persuasive Tactics in the Letter to Philemon

Paul employs a number of persuasive tactics in this brief letter to ensure that Philemon will do as he wishes.

To begin with, in the address of this letter Paul includes the entire church that meets in Philemon's house (v. 2), even though most of the content seems to be intended for Philemon personally (every occurrence in Greek of the word "you" in vv. 4–21 is singular). Thus there will be public knowledge of the request that Paul is making, and the whole congregation will know whether Philemon responds as Paul hopes.

Some of Paul's other tactics:

- Paul tells Philemon that he has a reputation for generosity (vv. 4–7). The implication is that if he now does as Paul suggests, that reputation will continue.
- Paul says that Philemon has refreshed "the hearts of the saints" (v. 7) and then appeals to him with the words "Refresh my heart in Christ" (v. 20). If Philemon were to refuse, he would be declining to do for Paul what he is renowned for doing for others.
- Paul indicates that he, as an apostle, has the authority to command Philemon to do what he wants done in this matter

(v. 8), but he refrains from giving such a command so that Philemon's good deed might be voluntary (v. 14). If Philemon were to refuse Paul's request, he would appear to be taking advantage of this gracious allowance.

- Paul reminds Philemon that the one making this request is an “old man” and a “prisoner for Christ Jesus” (v. 9). Philemon would have to be quite heartless to turn down such a supplicant.
- Paul emphasizes his personal affection for Onesimus: the man has become like a son to Paul (v. 10), and in sending him back to Philemon, Paul feels like he is giving up his own heart (v. 12). Thus if Philemon does not do Paul the favor of returning Onesimus to him, he will, in effect, be keeping something very dear to the apostle for himself.
- Paul also reminds Philemon of what he has done for him (v. 19): Philemon owes him his very “self” (i.e., his life as a new person in Christ and as an heir to eternal salvation). What favor could Paul possibly ask in return that would be too great?
- Paul asserts that he is absolutely confident that Philemon will comply, and do more besides (v. 21). Thus if Philemon were to fail to comply, he would be letting Paul down and disappointing someone who thinks highly of him.

- Paul concludes by telling Philemon that he plans to come for a visit as soon as he is released from prison (v. 22). Thus if Philemon fails to do as Paul suggests, he will have to deal with the disappointed apostle face-to-face, an awkward encounter to say the least.

In short, Paul manages in a few sentences to place Philemon in a position in which granting the request will be the only way to maintain honor with Paul, with his own family, and with his church. We do not know whether Paul did this because he suspected that Philemon would need this sort of pressure, or because the situation was particularly delicate, or simply because this was how one made requests of this sort in those days. It is possible that Philemon would have been delighted to grant Paul's request apart from any social pressure or rhetorical encouragement. In any case, Paul's letter would have made it difficult for him not to do as Paul wished.

23.12

Paul Is Witty (Box 23.5)

Paul chooses his words carefully in his letter to Philemon, using language in ways that are provocative and witty.

- *Euphemism*. Paul refers to Onesimus's problematic absence from the household (due to flight or failure to return home on schedule) simply as a time when Onesimus and Philemon have been "separated" for a while (v. 15).
- *Paradoxical tact*. Paul says that he is not going to mention the debt that Philemon owes to him (v. 19), but of course, in stating that he is not going to mention it, he actually does mention it.
- *Pun*. Paul indicates that Onesimus was once "useless" but is now truly "useful" (v. 11); the word "useless" (*achrēstos*) sounds like a word that means "without Christ" (*achristos*); the word "useful" (*euchrēstos*) is a synonym for a word that serves as Onesimus's proper name (*onēsimos*).
- *Wordplay*. Paul refers to Onesimus as "my own heart" (v. 12) and then calls on Philemon to "refresh my heart" (v. 20), giving the latter reference a double meaning: refresh Onesimus (who is Paul's heart), and refresh Paul's heart by sending Onesimus back to him.

23.13

Philemon 9—Was Paul an Old Man? (Box 23.4)

In his letter to Philemon, Paul says that he writes to his friend as a *presbytēs*, an “old man” (v. 9). This statement is intriguing because it is the only reference in the New Testament to Paul’s age. How old was he? What would qualify as an “old man” in those days?

Some scholars suggest that he is not necessarily referring to chronological age but rather to his status as a leader or “elder” in the church. But Paul never refers to himself as a church “elder” in any other instance, and writers who do refer to themselves that way use slightly different Greek words to do so (cf. 1 Pet. 5:1; 2 John 1; 3 John 1).

A few scholars have speculated that there might be an error in our manuscripts here. Paul did not write “elder” or “old man” but rather another word that looks very similar in Greek. They suggest that perhaps he referred to himself as a *presbeutēs* (“ambassador”; cf. *presbeuein* in 2 Cor. 5:20; Eph. 6:20), and a later copyist mistook that word for *presbytēs* (“old man” and “elder”). But this is simply a guess for which there is no actual evidence; we have no manuscripts in which the word *presbeutēs* (“ambassador”) occurs here.

23.14

Philemon and Runaway Slaves—An excerpt from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Box 23.6)

In chapter 11 of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), by Harriet Beecher Stowe, a slave named George lets it be known that he is planning to escape. Mr. Wilson, a sympathetic white man, responds,

Why, George, no—no—it won't do; this way of talking is wicked—unscriptural. George, you've got a hard master—in fact, he is—well he conducts himself reprehensibly—I can't pretend to defend him. But you know how the angel commanded Hagar to return to her mistress, and submit herself under her hand; and the apostle sent back Onesimus to his master.

The biblical references are to Genesis 16 and Paul's letter to Philemon.

George replies:

Don't quote Bible at me that way, Mr. Wilson . . . don't! for my wife is a Christian, and I mean to be, if ever I get to where I can; but to quote Bible to a fellow in my circumstances, is enough to make him give it up altogether. I appeal to God Almighty;—I'm willing to go with the case to Him, and ask Him if I do wrong to seek my freedom.

24.0

Hebrews: Outline of Contents

- I. The Revelation of the Word in the Son (1:1–4:13)
 - A. The Son greater than angels (1:1–2:18)
 - B. Exhortation to hear the voice of the Son (3:1–4:13)
- II. Christ the great high priest (4:14–10:31)
 - A. Exhortation to hold fast the confession (4:14–16)
 - B. Introduction of Christ the high priest (5:1–10)
 - C. Exhortation to endure and thereby obtain the promises
(5:11–6:20)
 - D. Christ the great high priest (7:1–10:18)
 - E. Exhortation to hold fast the confession (10:19–31)
- III. Call to faithful obedience (10:32–13:25)
 - A. Exhortation to endurance (10:32–12:13)
 - B. Sinai and Zion (12:14–29)
 - C. Concluding exhortations to faithfulness (13:1–25)

Courtesy of *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, ed. Mark Allan Powell (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 371.

24.1

Hebrews in the Revised Common Lectionary

Text	Series	Liturgical Occasion	Calendar Date
1:1–4 (5–12)	A, B, C	Christmas Day	Dec. 25
1:1–4; 2:5–12	B	Lectionary 27	Oct. 2–8
2:10–18	A	Christmas 1	1 Sunday after Dec. 25
4:12–16	B	Lectionary 28	Oct. 9–15
5:1–10	B	Lectionary 29	Oct. 16–22
5:5–10	B	Lent 5	2 Sundays before Easter
7:23–28	B	Lectionary 30	Oct. 23–29
9:11–14	B	Lectionary 31	Oct. 30–Nov. 5
9:24–28	B	Lectionary 32	Nov. 6–12
10:11–14, (15–18), 19–25	B	Lectionary 33	Nov. 13–19
10:5–10	C	Advent 4	1 Sunday before Dec. 25
11:1–3, 8–16	C	Lectionary 19	Aug. 7–13
11:29–12:2	C	Lectionary 20	Aug. 14–20
12:18–29	C	Lectionary 21	Aug. 21–27
13:1–8, 15–16	C	Lectionary 22	Aug. 28–Sept. 3

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24.3

Two Favorite Terms in Hebrews (Box 24.7)

Eternal

- eternal salvation (5:9)
- eternal judgment (6:2)
- eternal redemption (9:12)
- eternal Spirit (9:14)
- eternal inheritance (9:15)
- eternal covenant (13:20)

Heavenly

- heavenly calling (3:1)
- heavenly gift (6:4)
- heavenly sanctuary (8:5)
- heavenly things (9:23)
- heavenly country (11:16)
- heavenly Jerusalem (12:22)

24.4

Images and Titles for Jesus in Hebrews

One way to examine the Christology of Hebrews is to note the various titles, images, and categories that it uses to describe Jesus.

As in most writings of the New Testament, he is called:

- “Lord” (1:10; 2:3; 7:14; 13:20)
- “Son of God” or simply the “Son” (1:2, 5, 8; 3:6; 4:14; 5:5, 8; 6:6; 7:3, 28; 10:29)

What is most intriguing, however, are all the designations applied to Jesus in this book that are not used widely (if at all) elsewhere.

Jesus is referred to as:

- “heir” (1:2; cf. Mark 12:7; Rom. 8:17)
- “firstborn” (1:6; cf. Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:15, 18)
- “pioneer” (2:10; 12:2)
- “the one who sanctifies” (2:11; cf. John 17:19; Acts 26:18; 1 Cor. 1:2, 30)
- “apostle” (3:1)
- “builder of a house” (3:3; cf. 1 Pet. 2:5)
- “source of eternal salvation” (5:9)
- “forerunner” (6:20)
- “guarantee” (7:22)
- “minister” (8:2)

- “mediator” (8:6; 9:15; 12:24; cf. 1 Tim. 2:5)
- “perfecter” (12:2)
- “great shepherd of the sheep” (13:20; cf. John 10:1–18; 1 Pet. 2:25)
- “God” (1:8; cf. John 20:28; Titus 2:13)

Luke Timothy Johnson has noted that many of these affirmations might be understood as applying to two aspects of Christ’s work.¹ First, Jesus Christ brings salvation from God to humanity; thus he is apostle, source of eternal salvation, the one who sanctifies, shepherd, minister, builder, guarantee. Second, Jesus Christ brings humans to God (as the first human being to realize the complete obedience that is God’s plan for all); thus he is heir, firstborn, pioneer, perfecter, forerunner. The image of mediator fits both aspects, as does the letter’s favorite image for Jesus: high priest.

1. See Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrews*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 48–49.

24.5

Something Better (Box 24.4)

A prominent theme in Hebrews is that in Jesus Christ, God has provided “something better” (11:40):

- better things (6:9)
- a better hope (7:19)
- a better covenant (7:22; 8:6)
- better promises (8:6)
- better sacrifices (9:23)
- better possessions (10:34)
- a better country (11:16)
- a better resurrection (11:35)
- a better word (12:24)

24.6

The Divine and Human Christ in Hebrews (Box

24.5)

The Divine Christ

- the one through whom worlds were created (1:2)
- the mirror image (reflection) of God's glory (1:3)
- the exact imprint of God's very being (1:3)
- the one who sustains all things (1:3)
- seated at the right hand of God in glory (1:3)
- superior to angels (1:4) and worshiped by them (1:6)
- without sin (4:15) and able to sanctify others (2:11)
- will return to save those who wait eagerly for him (9:28; 10:37)

The Human Christ

- a person of flesh and blood, like all children of God (2:14; cf. 2:11)
- became like us in every respect (2:17)
- was tested by what he suffered (2:18)
- is able to sympathize (or empathize) with our weaknesses (4:15)
- was tested (or tempted) in every respect as we are (4:15)

- offered prayers to God with loud cries and tears and reverent submission (5:7)
- learned obedience through suffering (5:8; cf. 2:10)
- an example of perseverance that others can follow (12:1–3)

24.7

Hebrews and Paul: Some Parallels

Although modern scholars do not believe that Paul wrote Hebrews, they do recognize that some parallel expressions and ideas can be found in Paul's letters and the Letter to the Hebrews:

- exalts Christ above angelic spirits (Heb. 1:5–14; 2:2; cf. Gal. 4:9; Col. 1:16; 2:18)
- indicates that the gospel was confirmed through “signs and wonders” and miracles (Heb. 2:4; cf. Rom. 15:18–19; 2 Cor. 12:12; Gal. 3:2–5)
- refers to Christ taking on the likeness of humanity (Heb. 2:14–18; cf. Phil. 2:7–8)
- describes Christ as having greater glory than Moses (Heb. 3:2–3; cf. 2 Cor. 3:7–8)
- reads Israel's desert wanderings as a warning against laxity (Heb. 3:7–4:13; cf. 1 Cor. 10:1–13)
- claims that Christ has granted believers access to God and to divine blessings (Heb. 4:16; 10:19–22; cf. Rom. 5:1–2)
- says that the recipients are infants needing milk not solid food (Heb. 5:12–13; cf. 1 Cor. 3:1–2)
- refers to the Hebrew Scriptures as “the oracles of God” (Heb. 5:12; cf. Rom. 3:2)

- refers to Christ's death as an expiation (in Greek, *hilastērion*) (Heb. 9:5; cf. Rom. 3:25) and as an act of obedience (Heb. 5:8; cf. Rom. 5:19; Phil. 2:8)
- refers to Christ as one who has been sacrificed (Heb. 9:26, 28; cf. 1 Cor. 5:7)
- cites Abraham as an example of faith (Heb. 11:8; cf. Gal. 3:6–9)
- refers to perseverance in the Christian life as running a race (Heb. 12:1; cf. 1 Cor. 9:24)
- calls the recipients "saints" (Heb. 13:24; cf. Rom. 1:7)

24.8

Perfection in Hebrews (Box 24.6)

The Letter to the Hebrews often speaks of perfection:

- We (the readers) are encouraged to “go on toward perfection” (6:1).
- The hope of being made perfect was not fulfilled for even the most faithful heroes of the Bible (11:40).
- Religious rules and rituals cannot make people perfect (7:11, 19; 9:9; 10:1).

What can we do?

- Jesus Christ is the “perfecter of our faith” (12:2).
- Christ himself was made perfect (2:10; 5:8–9; 7:28).
- Then, by a single offering (his death), Christ made perfect for all time those who are sanctified by him (10:14).
- The spirits of the righteous enrolled in heaven have now been made perfect by Christ (12:23), and we look forward to joining them (13:14).

The perfection envisioned here is not simply or primarily moral perfection; Jesus was without sin (4:15), but he still needed to be made perfect. Rather, the idea is completion—people becoming all that they are meant to be. The discipline of learning obedience through suffering contributes to a process of perfection here on earth

(5:8–9; 12:11), but this is but a temporal realization of the complete and more glorious salvation that has been accomplished in the heavenly realm.

See David Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection: An Examination of the Concept of Perfection in the "Epistle to the Hebrews"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

24.9

The First Christian Platonist? (Box 24.3)

In the fourth century BCE, the Greek philosopher Plato introduced a two-tiered scheme of reality that appears to have been influential for the author of Hebrews. Plato claimed that the world of “ideas” was the most real and true world and that the physical world in which we live contains only representations of those ideas that are in some sense less real and less true.

Jews who were attracted to this notion often translated it into a contrast between what was heavenly and earthly (though that is not exactly the same thing). The writings of Philo of Alexandria, produced around the same time as the Letter to the Hebrews, provide illustrations of Jewish Platonism. Philo read Genesis 1:26–27 as reporting the creation of the “idea” (or “ideal form”) of humanity and Genesis 2:7 as reporting the creation of a material representation of this idea (a physical man formed from the dust of the earth).

Likewise, the author of Hebrews has sometimes been called “the first Christian Platonist.” He argues that the Jewish tabernacle is only “a sketch and shadow” of a heavenly sanctuary in which Jesus exercises his office as high priest (8:5–6; cf. 9:23; 10:1). The earthly sanctuary made by human hands is only a material representation of the more real, heavenly sanctuary, which was not made by hands.

Obviously, a more true and more real salvation is to be obtained in the heavenly sanctuary than the earthly one. Notably, Hebrews does not denigrate what is physical as evil or wrong: the contrast between earthly and heavenly is not between “bad” and “good” (as it would be in gnosticism); it is between “good” and “better.”

24.10

Hebrews and the Dead Sea Scrolls

Many scholars have noticed interesting connections between Hebrews and the Dead Sea Scrolls. The latter documents apparently were preserved by Jews who were contemporaries of Jesus in a remote desert community called Qumran.

The scrolls make much of the figure of Melchizedek (see Gen. 14:18–20), as does Hebrews (see 5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:1–17). This probably is because the community that preserved these scrolls remained enamored of priestly and liturgical theology even though they no longer accepted the legitimacy of the priesthood associated with the current temple in Jerusalem. The same could be said of the Christian writer who authored Hebrews.

The Qumran sectarians also made much use of the “new covenant” passage in Jeremiah 31:31–34 (cf. Heb. 8), and they took a harsh stance toward apostasy (cf. Heb. 6:4–6; 10:26–31; 12:16–17).

The most intriguing connection between Hebrews and Qumran, however, may have to do with messianic expectation. The Qumran sectarians were expecting two messiahs: one a priestly messiah, the other a royal messiah. The book of Hebrews presents Jesus both as a high priest after the order of Melchizedek and as a royal messiah who rules the universe from a throne in heaven (1:3, 8, 13; 2:5, 7, 9; 4:16; 7:1–2; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2, 28).

We have no way to know whether the author of Hebrews knew about the community at Qumran or whether he was familiar with their teachings. But it is interesting that Hebrews has so many contact points with their writings and, in particular, that it presents Jesus as the fulfillment of their dual expectation: he is both the priestly messiah and the royal messiah (see 10:12–13).

24.11

Hebrews in the Christian Canon

That Hebrews is anonymous proved to be something of an obstacle to its being accepted into the canon of Scripture. It was not included in our earliest list of New Testament Scriptures, the list that scholars call the “Muratorian Fragment” or “Muratorian Canon” (ca. 170–200). As time went by, however, the letter gained a broad audience, and it was especially favored by church leaders who found its christological teaching helpful in combating various sectarians whom they held to be heretical. Increasingly, the letter came to be ascribed to Paul, but this seems to have been motivated by a desire to help it achieve canonical status. The scholars of the church protested such ascriptions, but not too loudly. Origen (mid-third century) said, “The thoughts of the epistle are marvelous and in no way inferior to the acknowledged writings of the apostle” (see Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.25). A canonical list from the mid-fourth century, called the “Mommesen Catalogue” (or “Cheltenham List”), did not include Hebrews, but in the late fourth century Jerome said that it should be accepted as canonical because it is “honored daily by being read in the churches” (*Epistle* 129.3).

In short, Hebrews seems to represent a case in which canonical acceptance influenced decisions about authorship rather than the other way around. It came to be widely recognized as authoritative

on the basis of intrinsic merit in spite of being anonymous. The prevailing opinion seemed to be that this book comes from the same time period as other New Testament books, and it testifies brilliantly to matters that are wholly compatible with what is said in works attributed to apostolic witnesses. Thus it should be accorded a place among them even if we do not know the identity of the author.

24.12

Authorship of Hebrews

Hebrews is anonymous; it does not identify its author. Nevertheless, interpreters have investigated the matter over the centuries and tried to figure out who the author might be.

The Traditional Suggestion: Paul

Hebrews came to be associated with Paul in the second and third centuries. The primary reasons for suggesting Paul wrote the letter seem to be:

- Paul is known to have written many letters, including lengthy ones.
- Hebrews 13:23 Timothy (who was a companion of Paul).
- The benediction and greetings with which the letter closes (13:20–24) are reminiscent of Pauline letter closings.

Even in the early church, however, most scholars granted that these reasons were not terribly convincing. The real motivation behind ascribing the letter to Paul seems to have been to help the letter attain canonical status as a work of Scripture.

The Council of Trent in 1546 insisted on Pauline authorship of Hebrews and supposedly established this as the official position of the Roman Catholic Church. Likewise, in 1611 the King James

Version of the Bible (a Protestant work) credited Paul as the author in its title for the work: “The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews.” Nevertheless, almost no scholar in the modern world, Catholic or Protestant, would argue for Pauline authorship of Hebrews.

Reasons for Doubting That Paul Is the Author

There are at least four reasons to doubt that Paul wrote Hebrews.

1. The linguistic style of Hebrews is radically different from that of Paul, and many of Paul’s characteristic expressions cannot be found here (e.g., “Christ Jesus,” used over ninety times in Paul’s letters, never appears in Hebrews).
2. Paul regarded himself as “an apostle to the Gentiles” (Rom. 11:13; Gal. 2:8).
4. Paul claimed that he was an eyewitness to the risen Jesus (1 Cor. 15:8); contrary to what is suggested in Hebrews 2:3–4, he would not have described himself as someone who had come to faith through the preaching of others or as someone whose authority as an apostle depended on the testimony of others (see Gal. 1:11–17).
4. Many of Paul’s most prominent themes are not found here, and conversely, the dominant theme of Hebrews (the high priesthood of Jesus) is never mentioned by Paul.

Of course, some statements and themes in Hebrews do parallel things that can be found in Paul's letters, but these are no more pronounced than what we would expect to find in the writings of any two Christian theologians from the same era.

Alternative Suggestions

Many other suggestions regarding the author of this book have been offered.

Barnabas: As an alternative to Paul, some scholars have suggested one of Paul's closest companions: Barnabas, who worked with Paul in his early years. Barnabas would have known Timothy, and he had a Levitical background (Acts 4:36). This suggestion was first offered by Tertullian in the early third century (*On Modesty* 20).

Luke: Quite a few interpreters have suggested that Hebrews might be the work of the same person who wrote the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts. Luke's Greek is more polished and closer in style to the Greek of Hebrews than any other writer in the New Testament. Clement of Alexandria (150–215) thought that Luke was translating a letter into Greek that Paul had written in Hebrew. This same view was espoused later by Thomas Aquinas. But modern scholars note that many of the rhetorical wordplays used in Hebrews would work only if the letter were written originally in Greek. John Calvin thought that either Luke or Clement of Rome was the most likely author of Hebrews.

Philip: Many scholars have suggested Philip or one of the other Hellenists who were colleagues of Stephen (Acts 6:5; 8:5–40; 21:8–9). The reason for this is that Stephen’s speech in Acts 7:2–53 is said to recount Jewish history and deprecate Jewish shrines in a manner similar to Hebrews (cf. Acts 7:2–34 with Heb. 11; Acts 7:44–50 with Heb. 9). Since Stephen himself cannot be the author (having been martyred immediately after delivering that speech), the next best thing may be to ascribe the book of Hebrews to one of his colleagues, who presumably would have thought in a similar vein. Philip was the most prominent of those colleagues. One problem with this thesis is that Hebrews deals with the tabernacle, not the temple, and it does not question the historical legitimacy of either institution (cf. Acts 7:48); it merely claims that sacrificial institutions have now been rendered obsolete (Heb. 8:13; 9:25–26).

Apollos: Martin Luther put forward the suggestion that Apollos might be the author of Hebrews. Apollos had Alexandrian connections, he was said to be well versed in the Scriptures, and he was famous for his eloquence (Acts 18:24–28; 19:1; 1 Cor. 1:12; 3:4–22; 4:6; 16:12; Titus 3:13). This view continues to attract support. Paul Ellingworth calls it the “least unlikely of the conjectures that have been put forward.”¹ Luke Timothy Johnson is intrigued by the possibility that Apollos might have written Hebrews to Corinth prior to Paul’s writing of 1 Corinthians to that same city.²

Priscilla: Some modern scholars have favored Priscilla (Acts 18:2, 18, 26; cf. Rom. 16:3; 1 Cor. 16:19; 2 Tim. 4:19), whose name would have been subsequently removed to avoid the scandal of instruction being offered by a woman. This view was first put forward by Adolf von Harnack in 1900. It was more recently championed in Ruth Hoppin³ An obstacle for many is that Hebrews 11:32 employs a masculine construction in Greek implying that the “I” who is speaking is male; this probably requires an assumption that Priscilla is intentionally hiding her identity.

Clement of Rome: A number of scholars have thought that the letter could be the work of Clement, a bishop of Rome who is probably the author of at least one letter using much of the same language employed here (*1 Clement*). According to Origen (third century), some Christians in his day thought that Clement had written the letter based on notes from things that Paul had said (see Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.14.13). This possibility was taken seriously by John Calvin. There are many undeniable parallels between the letter known as *1 Clement* and the Letter to the Hebrews, but those similarities usually are explained as the result of Clement having a copy of Hebrews and quoting from it. Furthermore, modern scholars note that *1 Clement* espouses a positive attitude toward Levitical sacrifices that may be incompatible with the attitude taken toward those sacrifices in Hebrews.

Mary the Mother of Jesus: This proposal was put forward in a journal article by Josephine Massyngberde Ford.⁴ Raymond Brown averred that this proposal wins “the prize for dubious ingenuity.”⁵

Others: Other suggestions include Silas (Acts 15:22–18:17; cf. 2 Cor 1:19; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1; 1 Pet. 5:12) and Epaphras (Col. 1:7; 4:12; Philem. 23).

Accepting the Letter as Anonymous

Virtually all scholars today would grant that the definitive view on this question was offered by Origen, a prominent Christian teacher in the third century: “Who wrote this epistle? Only God knows!” (reported in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.25.13).

Raymond Brown has summed up the matter this way: “We have to be satisfied with the irony that the most sophisticated rhetorician and elegant theologian of the New Testament is an unknown.”⁶

Many interpreters note that the letter comes to us like Melchizedek the priest, “without father or mother or genealogy” (Heb. 7:3); Abraham was expected to recognize the divine voice in Melchizedek, though he knew nothing of his origins, and Christians are in a similar position regarding the anonymous letter to the Hebrews.

The Author of Hebrews—What We Can Know

- The author of Hebrews was a person of prominence in the early church.

- He knew people who had known Jesus (2:3).
- He was well educated with regard to both Greek rhetoric and the Jewish Scriptures.
- He knew the readers personally.
- He assumes a mandate to speak to these readers authoritatively, even though he does not appear to have been the founder of their community.
- He is planning to visit the readers soon (13:19, 23), which may indicate that he exercises a supervisory role for the congregation beyond that of its local leaders (13:7, 17, 24).

1. Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 21.

2. Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrews*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 42–44.

3. See Ruth Hoppin, *Priscilla: Author of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (New York: Exposition Press, 1969).

4. Josephine Massyngberde Ford, "The Mother of Jesus and the Authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews," *The Bible Today* 82 (February 1976): 673–94.

5. Raymond Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, ABRL (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 695.

6. Brown, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 695.

24.13

Structure of Hebrews

Exposition and Exhortation

The book of Hebrews alternates between sections expounding Christian doctrine and sections exhorting the readers to persevere in faith and act in ways appropriate to their confession:

1:1–14	exposition	2:1–4	exhortation
2:5–3:6	exposition	3:7–4:16	exhortation
5:1–10	exposition	5:11–6:20	exhortation
7:1–10:18	exposition	10:19–13:25	exhortation

Concentric Circles?

Albert Vanhoye has proposed that the book of Hebrews is organized in a chiasmic pattern of concentric circles: the outer material at the beginning and end of the book deals with eschatological concerns (the revelation of Christ and culmination of God’s plan in the last days); an inner circle deals with ecclesiological concerns (living faithfully for Christ as a community in the present world); and the center of the book presents its principal theme, an exposition on sacrifice.

A	eschatology	the name superior to the angels (1:5–2:18)
B	ecclesiology	Jesus faithful and compassionate (3:1–5:10)
C	sacrifice	the central exposition (5:11–10:39)
B’	ecclesiology	faith and endurance (11:1–12:13)
A’	eschatology	the peaceful fruit of justice (12:14–13:19)

See Albert Vanhoye, *Structure and Message of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, SubB
12 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1989).

24.14

The Audience for the Letter to the Hebrews

For whom was the letter to the Hebrews written? Most scholars believe that the letter is addressed to Christians who were attracted to the Jewish religion and that it aims to forestall apostasy and/or compromise: the author wants to dissuade Christians from abandoning their faith and/or adopting Jewish practices that would be inconsistent with that faith.

This much seems clear. But can we be more specific?

Jewish Christians

The letter might be addressed to Jewish Christians: the emphasis on “descendants of Abraham” in 2:16 suggests this, as does the traditional ascription (“To the Hebrews”) that was applied to the letter by the early church. If the letter is in fact addressed to Jewish Christians, then those believers might be thinking about returning to the fold from which they had supposedly been converted.

Why would they do that? Perhaps they missed the liturgical grandeur and the historical grounding that such a long-established religion had to offer. Or maybe they had suffered too much government-sponsored persecution leveled against Christianity (as a new, unsanctioned faith) and realized that Judaism was more widely recognized and tolerated. Maybe they wanted a relief from tensions that their Christian faith produced with Jewish relatives and

neighbors. Or perhaps they had grown impatient and frustrated, because Jesus had not returned as expected. The letter to the Hebrews can be read as addressing all of these concerns.

Gentile Christians

The letter might be addressed to gentile Christians. The list of items on which the readers were instructed when first coming to the faith includes some matters (resurrection of the dead, final judgment) that would not have been new for Jews (6:1–2); there would have been no reason for Jewish Christians to have been instructed in such matters. If the letter is addressed to gentile Christians, then, the readers would have been Christians converted from paganism who were beginning to think of Christianity as a stepping-stone to the older, deeper religion of Judaism. The author wants to tell them that Jewish faith is preparatory for Christian confession, not vice versa.

Christians Attracted to “Jewish Christianity”

It is also possible (whether the recipients were ethnically Jewish or gentile or both) that the attraction was not to the non-Christian religion of Judaism but rather to some version of Jewish Christianity that the author of Hebrews considers a breach with the true faith. If so, then the intended recipients might not have thought that they were flirting with apostasy by incorporating more Jewish elements into their religion: they saw themselves converting not from Christianity to Judaism but rather from one form of Christianity

(gentile Christianity) to another form of Christianity (Jewish Christianity). The author of Hebrews, however, wants to convince them that such a change will constitute a falling away from Christ and, indeed, a turning away from the living God (3:12).

Specific Proposals for Location

Palestine

- Were the letter's recipients the sect of Jerusalem Christians who are contrasted with "the Hellenists" (Acts 6:1)?
- Were they converted Jewish priests who had been barred from offering sacrifices after confessing faith in Christ (Acts 6:7)?
- Were they converts from the sect at Qumran?
- Were they Jewish Christians who had fled Jerusalem rather than join in the revolt against Rome?

These guesses are intriguing, but none has carried the day. Notably, all of these guesses assume that the readers were Jewish Christians and, further, that they were in Jerusalem or Palestine. This idea—that the Letter to the Hebrews was written for believers in Palestine—is based on the assumption that all the attention to the Jewish priesthood and to sacrificial practices would be especially appropriate for readers in that part of the world (where the ancient tabernacle and successive temples had been erected). But would an

author write a letter in elegant Greek to a setting where Hebrew and Aramaic were the native languages?

Rome

In recent years, more scholars have thought that the letter might be written to Christians in Rome. These points are noted:

- The Jewish Christian heritage was strong in Rome.
- Timothy (who is mentioned in 13:23) would have been well known to Roman Christians.
- The gospel had been preached in Rome by people who had known Jesus (cf. Heb. 2:3).
- Believers had been persecuted in Rome (cf. Heb. 10:32–34).
- There are parallels between the thought and style of Hebrews and Paul's letter to Roman Christians.
- Our first references to Hebrews outside the New Testament come from Clement, who was the bishop of Rome in the late 90s.

But such factors do not allow for certainty, and most scholars will grant that the intended recipients of this letter could have been located in almost any city of the Roman Empire (Ephesus and Corinth have also been suggested). In fact, if the letter was written some time after the mid-60s, its comment that so far no one in the

community had suffered bloodshed for the faith (12:4) would make no sense in a letter addressed to Rome.

A Side Note

The letter does offer one reference that seems to provide a clue for situating its readers (or at least its author) geographically, but in actuality this clue has not proved very helpful. At the end of the letter the author says, “Those from Italy send you greetings” (13:24).

Some scholars have said this means the author is writing to Rome and offering greetings from people who have traveled from Rome to wherever the author is. That interpretation is possible. Or, the author could be writing from Rome and extending greetings on behalf of all Roman Christians. For that matter, the author could be writing from almost anywhere to almost anywhere and simply passing along greetings from some associates who were popularly known as “those from Italy.”

Letter to the Hebrews: Facts about Its Intended Readers

The Letter to the Hebrews does not specify who its original readers were or where they lived, but it does reveal a number of facts about them:

- They are Christians (3:6; 4:14; 10:23).
- They are Christians with a strong interest in sacrificial practices and other matters of Jewish faith.

- They heard the message of salvation from people who heard it from Jesus (2:3); thus they are second-generation Christians, but not third- or fourth-generation Christians.
- They have witnessed signs and wonders and various miracles and have received diverse gifts of the Holy Spirit (2:4).
- They are sufficiently educated and astute to understand arguments that employ both Hellenistic rhetoric and allusive reasoning based on the Jewish Scripture.
- They have gone through a hard time that required them to endure abuse, persecution, and suffering (10:32–33).
- Some of them had their property plundered (10:34), but thus far the abuse has not involved bloodshed (12:4).
- They have been exemplary in good works (6:10), such as showing compassion to those who suffer (10:34).
- They nevertheless have now become “dull in understanding” (5:11) and potentially “sluggish” (6:12; cf. 12:12).
- They seem to be in danger of apostasy, renouncing their faith or drifting away from the truth (2:1–3; 3:12–14; 4:1; 10:35–36); some are already neglecting to meet with the community (10:25).

24.15

Use of the Old Testament in Hebrews

The Letter to the Hebrews refers to Old Testament Scriptures more frequently than any other New Testament writing except the Gospel of Matthew. All the quotations are from the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Bible that was used primarily by Diaspora Jews who could no longer read Hebrew. This explains why the quotations do not always match word for word what the Old Testament texts actually say in our Bibles.

Scholars have devoted considerable attention to understanding how this letter employs these texts. The following tendencies are often noted:

- The author makes widespread use of typology, according to which persons and events in the Old Testament are thought to correspond to persons and events in the present era.
- Hebrews evinces a broad understanding of prophecy (as something more than just literal prediction).
- Hebrews exhibits an exegetical tendency to interpret specific texts in light of the full sweep of God's dealings with God's people (i.e., in light of what is sometimes called "salvation history").
- The author likes to use catenas (chains) of verses that are connected by the occurrence of a common word. Thus in

Hebrews 1:1–13, the supremacy of Christ to angels is established by quoting seven Old Testament texts one after the other: Psalm 2:7; 2 Samuel 7:14; Deuteronomy 32:43; Psalms 104:4; 45:6–7; 102:25–27; 110:1.

- The author is also clever in noting the meaning of names and other key words: the name Melchizedek means “king of righteousness,” and his title “king of Salem” also establishes him as “king of peace” (7:2).
- The author is also adept at using certain Scriptures to interpret others. In 3:7–4:13, he uses Psalm 95:7–11 to interpret the meaning of the Moses and Joshua stories: the psalm reveals that the Israelites did not enter God’s rest; still, the plea to listen to God’s voice “today” (Ps. 95:7) implies that God’s rest is still available. This cannot mean a literal exodus from Egypt or conquest of Canaan, so what does it mean? To what rest could it refer? The author of Hebrews looks elsewhere, to Genesis 2:2, which speaks of a “sabbath rest” (Heb. 4:9). This must be the rest that is still available today.

The Word of God

The author of Hebrews clearly believes that the Jewish Scriptures (which Christians now call the “Old Testament”) are authoritative and inspired by the Holy Spirit (3:7; 10:15). Furthermore, biblical passages often can be regarded as conveying the voice of God to

the readers as well as to the ancestors to whom the words were originally addressed (10:15; 12:5; cf. 1:1). In part, this appropriation of the Scriptures seems to derive from the author's conviction that the last days have now dawned (1:2): all the words of God and the entire history of God's dealings with God's people are finding ultimate fulfillment and relevance in the era that heralds the culmination of all things.

Scripture is regarded as a *living* word. One well-known passage in Hebrews says that "the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (4:12). This acclamation could refer to the preached or proclaimed word of God, but surely it refers to Scripture as well. Indeed, whereas Paul typically introduces biblical quotes with the words "It is written," Hebrews introduces quotes with some variation of the phrase "God says" (twenty-three times) or "the Holy Spirit says" (3:7; 10:15, 17; see also 9:8) or "Jesus says" (2:12–13; 10:5). This pattern renders somewhat humorous the one anomalous reference in 2:6: "Someone has testified somewhere . . ." Did the author perhaps forget where the quoted text (Ps. 8:4) was found, or did he just think the particular context (author, book) was irrelevant. Either way, the overall impression of Hebrews is that God speaks through Scripture and that God's words constitute a dynamic force that judges humanity with privileged discernment (4:13–14).

Christological Interpretation

More precisely, interpretation of Scripture is overtly and unapologetically christological: many of the Old Testament passages cited are held to be about Jesus (e.g., 1:6; 10:37–38); some of them are even understood to have been spoken to Jesus (e.g., 1:5, 8–13; 5:5–6) or, indeed, by Jesus (2:12–13; 10:5–7).

One example of christological interpretation is found in 11:24–26, which talks about Moses:

By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called a son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered abuse suffered for the Christ to be greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt.

This report draws on the story of Moses in Exodus 2:10–15, but it identifies the hardships he endured as “abuse suffered for the Christ.” How could Moses have suffered for Christ? Was this the preexistent Christ? Moses becomes a paradigm for the readers of Hebrews, who also must endure financial loss and social ostracism as abuses suffered for Christ (10:32–34; 13:13).

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24.16

Why Don't the Quotations Match? (Box 24.1)

Astute Bible readers sometimes note that Old Testament passages quoted in the Letter to the Hebrews do not quite match what is actually said in the Old Testament itself. For example:

Psalm 8:5: “lower than God”

Hebrews 2:7: “lower than the angels”

The Letter to the Hebrews regularly quotes from the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Old Testament. Almost all modern Bibles contain translations of the Old Testament done from the Hebrew, not from the Septuagint (so as not to produce a translation of a translation).

The Hebrew word in Psalm 8:5 is *elohim*, which usually means “God,” though it might sometimes mean “angels.” Almost all Bible translators have thought that the psalmist intended the word to mean “God,” and almost all English Bibles translate Psalm 8:5 as “lower than God.” The Septuagint, however, translates *elohim* with the Greek word for “angels” in this one verse, and the author of Hebrews relied on that somewhat idiosyncratic translation in making his point.

Something similar happens a number of other times in the letter. For example, in Psalm 40:6 we read “you have given me an open ear” in modern translations of the Old Testament, but Hebrews 10:5 follows

a Septuagint reading in quoting the text as “a body you have prepared for me.”

24.17

Honor and Shame in Hebrews

The author of Hebrews has the difficult task of addressing people who have committed themselves to a way of life that lacks social approval, and of doing so in a culture that puts a very high premium on the acquisition of public honor and the avoidance of public disgrace or shame. He does not challenge the importance of honor and shame as such but, rather, suggests a reappraisal of what will ultimately count as “honorable” and “shameful”: conventional wisdom has this wrong, defining the values in ways that do not concur with the judgment of God.

First, the letter encourages its readers to consider any loss of status or social reputation that they have experienced because of their faith as an ironic badge of honor. Since God disciplines those whom God favors (12:5–6), such trials may be viewed as an indication of divine approval.

Second, the letter reminds readers that they are in good company. The heroes of the Bible also were people who suffered loss of wealth and prestige in this life in exchange for greater, lasting honor in the world to come (11:8–10, 13–16, 24–26). Even those who seemed to be the lowest of the low—people who were imprisoned or chained, who suffered horrible torments and disgraceful deaths, who wandered homeless in the wilderness and lived in caves, who

wrapped their bodies in animal skins because they had no clothes, who were utterly destitute and miserable—ultimately would be recognized as ones “of whom the world was not worthy” (11:36–38). In short, those whom the world despised turned out to be the ones who were ultimately accorded the greatest honor. Indeed, they ended up being regarded as people who put the world to shame. Finally, the book of Hebrews draws on the image of an athletic contest or a race (12:1; cf. 10:35–36; 12:12–13): the Christian pilgrimage may be viewed as a competition for honorable victory. Yielding to society’s pressures and “giving up” would constitute ignoble defeat.

See David A. deSilva, *Despising Shame: Honor Discourse and Community Maintenance in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, SBLDS 152 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995).

24.18

Hebrews 6:1–2—The Basics of Faith (Box 24.2)

Hebrews 6:1–2 lists six matters as “basic teaching” that mature Christians should have down pat. It is a little embarrassing that we lack clarity regarding things that are supposed to be so obvious that no instruction is necessary, but sometimes that is the case.

- *Repentance from dead works.* Believers should reject “dead works,” but what are those? The reference may be to sinful behaviors that lead to death, or it could be to ritual practices of the Jewish religion that Christ has rendered obsolete. See also Hebrews 9:14.
- *Faith toward God.* Believers should trust radically in God and in God’s promises (cf. Heb. 11:1–12:2).
- *Baptisms.* Why is this in the plural? Perhaps it refers to various purification rites practiced by Jews (cf. Heb. 9:10). Did the readers of this letter practice those rituals? Or did they have some variant understanding of Christian baptism as an action practiced more than once or for diverse functions (cf. 1 Cor. 15:29, a verse that also refers to some primitive baptismal practice about which we have no knowledge)?
- *Laying on of hands.* This refers to a rite through which human touch accompanies or imparts divine authorization or

empowerment (cf. 2 Tim. 1:6), but it could be practiced for a variety of reasons: conveying the gift of the Holy Spirit to believers (Acts 8:17; 19:6); commissioning leaders (Acts 6:6; 1 Tim. 5:22); healing the sick (Acts 9:12; 28:8).

- *Resurrection of the dead.* All persons will be raised to new life when Christ returns.
- *Eternal judgment.* God will judge all people, granting them salvation or condemnation (cf. Heb. 9:27; 10:26–27; 13:4).

24.19

Hebrews Humor in Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*

Finnegan's Wake, published in 1939, was the final novel by Irish writer James Joyce. Although it is consistently named by critics as one of the best works of the twentieth century, it has not been widely read by the general public. This is in part due to how almost the entire work is written in an idiosyncratic language that approximates English lexically. For the enlightened, however, the text is replete with linguistic puns and other word plays, enhanced by literary allusions and free associations.

A classic example of the humor evident in *Finnegan's Wake* may be seen in the author's reference to "the farced epistol to the hibruws." Sounding out the words, we realize he is talking about a biblical book, "the First Epistle to the Hebrews." A further joke is embedded in the reference, however, because as Joyce well knew (but thought his readers might not), there is only one Epistle to the Hebrews in the Bible. It is pompously nonsensical to speak of the "First Epistle to the Hebrews" when there is no Second.

The student-friendly website Schmoop.com notes all the above and observes, "You know you're high-brow when your jokes need footnotes."

24.20

Hebrews 11 and a Demonstration of Aphrahat

Hebrews 11 is sometimes called “the roll call of faith” because it describes the nature and accomplishments of faith with reference to numerous heroes of the Old Testament.

A third-century Syrian Christian named Aphrahat offers a similar description of faith in an exposition that was probably inspired by Hebrews 11, the text of which is printed below.

Aphrahat (280–345)

Aphrahat was a third-century Syrian Christian who lived and worked within the sphere of the Persian empire. He wrote twenty-three expositions on Christian doctrine and practice, called *Demonstrations*. In one, he waxes eloquent about the power and nature of faith:

So let us draw near then, my beloved, to faith, since its powers
are so many.

For faith raised up [Enoch] to the heavens [Gen. 5:24]
and conquered the deluge [Gen. 7:21–22].

Faith causes the barren to sprout forth [Gen. 21:1–3].

It delivers from the sword. [Gen. 22:1–19] . . .

It raises the dead, and brings them up from Sheol.

It stills the billows [Matt. 8:26].

It heals the sick [Matt. 9:2, 22].

. . .

It stops the mouths of lions, and quenches the flame of fire.

It humiliates the proud, and brings the humble to honor.

All these mighty works are wrought by faith.

Now this is faith; when one believes in God the Lord of all,

. . .

He sent his Spirit upon the prophets.

Moreover he sent his Christ into the world, that we should

believe in the resurrection of the dead; and should also trust in
the efficacy of our baptism.

This is the faith of the church of God.

Demonstration 4.17–19

Text of Hebrews 11

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. **2** Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. **3** By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible. **4** By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain's. Through this he received approval as righteous, God himself giving approval to his gifts; he died, but through his faith he still speaks. **5** By faith Enoch was taken so that he did not experience death; and "he was not found, because God had taken him." For it was attested before he was taken away that "he had pleased God." **6** And without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who

seek him. **7** By faith Noah, warned by God about events as yet unseen, respected the warning and built an ark to save his household; by this he condemned the world and became an heir to the righteousness that is in accordance with faith. **8** By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. **9** By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. **10** For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. **11** By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was too old—and Sarah herself was barren—because he considered him faithful who had promised. **12** Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, “as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.” **13** All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, **14** for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. **15** If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. **16** But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them. **17** By faith Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac. He who had received the promises was ready to offer up his only son, **18** of whom he had been told,

“It is through Isaac that descendants shall be named for you.”

19 He considered the fact that God is able even to raise someone from the dead—and figuratively speaking, he did receive him back. **20** By faith Isaac invoked blessings for the future on Jacob and Esau. **21** By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, “bowing in worship over the top of his staff.” **22** By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave instructions about his burial. **23** By faith Moses was hidden by his parents for three months after his birth, because they saw that the child was beautiful; and they were not afraid of the king’s edict. **24** By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called a son of Pharaoh’s daughter, **25** choosing rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. **26** He considered abuse suffered for the Christ to be greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking ahead to the reward. **27** By faith he left Egypt, unafraid of the king’s anger; for he persevered as though he saw him who is invisible. **28** By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel. **29** By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as if it were dry land, but when the Egyptians attempted to do so they were drowned. **30** By faith the walls of Jericho fell after they had been encircled for seven days. **31** By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had received the spies in peace. **32** And what more should I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of

David and Samuel and the prophets— **33** who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, **34** quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. **35** Women received their dead by resurrection. Others were tortured, refusing to accept release, in order to obtain a better resurrection. **36** Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. **37** They were stoned to death, they were sawn in two, they were killed by the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, persecuted, tormented— **38** of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. **39** Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, **40** since God had provided something better so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect.

25.0

James: Outline of Contents

- I. Epistolary introduction (1:1)
- II. Introduction of major themes (1:2–27)
 - A. Enduring trials (1:2–4, 12–15)
 - B. Prayer and divine wisdom (1:5–8)
 - C. Rich and poor (1:9–11)
 - D. Wisdom from above (1:16–18)
 - E. The use of the tongue (1:19–21)
 - F. Doers of the word (1:22–27)
- III. Development of major themes (2:1–5:20)
 - A. Rich and poor in the assembly (2:1–13)
 - B. Doers of the word (2:14–26)
 - C. The use of the tongue (3:1–12)
 - D. Prayer and divine wisdom (3:13–4:10)
 - E. Doers of the law and judging one's neighbor (4:11–12)
 - F. Rich and poor and the pursuit of wealth (4:13–5:6)
 - G. Endurance of trials (5:7–11)
 - H. On swearing (5:12)
 - I. Prayer and faith (5:13–18)

J. The recovery of a neighbor (5:19–20)

Courtesy of *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, ed. Mark Allan Powell (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 427.

25.1

James in the Revised Common Lectionary

Text	Series	Liturgical Occasion	Calendar Date
1:17–27	B	Lectionary 22	Aug. 28–Sept. 3
2:1–10 (11–13), 14–17	B	Lectionary 23	Sept. 4–10
3:1–12	B	Lectionary 24	Sept. 11–17
3:13–4:3, 7–8a	B	Lectionary 25	Sept. 18–24
5:7–10	A	Advent 3	2 Sundays before Dec. 25
5:13–20	B	Lectionary 26	Sept. 25–Oct. 1

25.2

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25.3

Parallels between James and the Sermon on the Mount

The Letter of James	Sermon on the Mount (Gospel of Matthew)
“Whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy” (1:2).	“When people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you. . . . Rejoice and be glad” (5:11–12).
“You may be mature [<i>teleioi</i>] and complete, lacking in nothing” (1:4).	“Be perfect [<i>teleioi</i>] . . . as your heavenly Father is perfect” (5:48).
“Ask God . . . and it will be given you” (1:5).	“Ask, and it will be given you” (7:7).
“Be doers of the word, and not merely hearers” (1:22).	“Everyone then who hears these words . . . and acts on them will be like a wise man” (7:24).
“Has not God chosen the poor in the world . . . to be heirs of the kingdom?” (2:5).	“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (5:3).
“Whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it” (2:10).	“Whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments . . . will be called least in the kingdom of heaven” (5:19).
“Judgment will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy” (2:13).	“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy” (5:7).
“What good is it . . . if you say you have faith, but do not have works? Can faith save you?” (2:14).	“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father” (7:21).
“Can a fig tree . . . yield olives, or a grapevine figs?” (3:12).	“Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles?” (7:16).
“A harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace” (3:18).	“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (5:9).
“Friendship with the world is enmity with God” (4:4).	“You cannot serve God and wealth” (6:24).
“Purify your hearts” (4:8).	“Blessed are the pure in heart” (5:8).
“Who, then, are you to judge your neighbor?” (4:12).	“Do not judge, so that you may not be judged” (7:1).
“Your riches have rotted, and your clothes are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have rusted” (5:2–3).	“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal” (6:19).

“Do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged” (5:9).	“Do not judge, so that you may not be judged” (7:1).
“Do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your ‘Yes’ be yes and your ‘No’ be no” (5:12).	“Do not swear at all, either by heaven . . . or by the earth. . . . Let your word be ‘Yes, Yes’ or ‘No, No’” (5:34–37).

Other passages in James that parallel sayings of Jesus include 1:6 (cf. Matt. 21:21); 1:9 and 4:10 (cf. Matt. 23:12); 1:12 (cf. Matt. 10:22); 1:21 (cf. Mark 4:14); 4:9 (cf. Luke 6:21, 25); 4:17 (cf. Luke 12:47); 5:1–6 (cf. Luke 6:24); 5:9 (cf. Matt. 24:33); 5:17 (cf. Luke 4:25).

25.4

Parallels between James and Proverbs

	James	Proverbs
Wisdom is given by God.	1:5	2:6–7
Wealth is ephemeral, and riches will “wither away.”	1:10–11	11:28
It is a virtue to be “slow to anger.”	1:19	14:29
Impartiality is to be encouraged.	2:1	18:5
Partiality to the rich dishonors the poor.	2:6	14:20–21
The wise are attentive to controlling their speech.	3:2	10:19
The tongue can be a deadly fire.	3:6	16:27
It is arrogant to boast of tomorrow.	4:13–14	27:1
Multiple sins may be “covered” by worthy acts of love.	5:20	10:12

See Paul J. Achtemeier, Joel B. Green, and Marianne Meye Thompson, *Introducing the New Testament: Its Literature and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 501.

25.5

Propositions about God in the Letter of James

(Box 25.5)

The Letter of James is primarily concerned with ethical teaching, but the principles that it espouses do assume a generic theological foundation. Thus the letter also offers several propositions about God's nature and character:

- God gives to all, “generously and ungrudgingly” (1:5).
- God has promised a “crown of life” to those who love God (1:12).
- God cannot be tempted by evil, and God tempts no one (1:13).
- God is “the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow” (1:17).
- God created us by “the word of truth” (1:18).
- God favors the poor (2:5).
- God is one (2:19).
- God is the “Lord and Father” and has made humans in the likeness of God (3:9).
- God answers the prayers of the righteous (4:2–3; 5:16–18).
- God yearns jealously for our spiritual devotion (4:5).

- “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (4:6, 10).
- God draws near to those who draw near to God (4:8).
- God is both lawgiver and judge, able to save and destroy (4:12).
- God’s will trumps all human plans (4:13–15).
- God hears the cries of the exploited and oppressed (5:4).
- God is compassionate and merciful to the patient (5:11).
- God heals the sick and forgives sins (5:15).

It is often noted that although all of these points are important for Christians, they are not specifically Christian declarations. These things would also be confessed by Jews (and, for that matter, by deists, Muslims, and adherents of other religions).

As for Jesus Christ, this letter tells us only that he is our “glorious Lord” (2:1; cf. 1:1) and that his coming (as judge) is near (5:7–9).

25.6

Rich and Poor in James (Box 25.7)

The Poor

- the lowly (1:9)
- orphans and widows (1:27)
- persons dressed in dirty clothes or naked (2:2, 15)
- those who lack daily food (2:15)
- day laborers defrauded of wages (5:4)
- dishonored by those who show partiality (2:3–4, 6, 9)
- will be raised up (1:9)
- focus of concern for pure and undefiled religion (1:27)
- bodily needs will be met by believers whose faith is not dead (2:14–17)
- chosen by God to be rich in faith (2:5)
- heirs of the kingdom promised to those who love God (2:5)
- cries have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts (5:4)

The Rich

- persons with gold rings and fine clothes (2:2)
- receive preferred treatment even in the church (2:3)
- live in luxury and pleasure (5:5)
- plan for a year how to do business and make money (4:13)

- oppress others and drag them into court (2:6)
- blaspheme the name of Christ (2:7)
- defraud workers of fair wages (5:4)
- condemn and murder the righteous, who do not resist (5:6)
- will disappear like a flower in the field (1:10)
- a mist that appears for a while and then vanishes (4:14)
- should boast in being brought low (1:10)
- should weep and wail for the miseries coming to them (5:1)
- riches will rot and clothes will be moth-eaten (5:2)
- gold and silver will rust and eat their flesh like fire (5:3)
- have fattened their hearts in a day of slaughter (5:5)

25.7

James and the Other Brothers of Jesus (Box 25.1)

The Synoptic Gospels report that Jesus had four brothers—James, Joses, Judas, and Simon—plus an unknown number of sisters whose names are also unknown (Mark 6:3). Since James is listed first, he is often thought to be the oldest of these brothers, although perhaps he is listed first simply because he was the one who became best known.

The Gospels indicate that the brothers of Jesus did not “believe in him” during the time of his ministry (John 7:5). At one point they attempt to seize him and take him home for a forced retirement from doing and saying things that are leading people to think he is “beside himself” (Mark 3:21, 31–35). The Gospel of John even presents Jesus on the cross choosing one of his disciples to care for his mother after his death, which seems like an affront to James and his other brothers (John 19:25–27).

After Easter, things changed. Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians that the risen Jesus appeared to James (1 Cor. 15:7). The book of Acts indicates that the brothers of Jesus (all of them?) were part of the early church in Jerusalem (Acts 1:14) and, apparently, were present for the great event on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1–4). A short while later, James appears to be the leader of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 12:17; 21:18). He presides over the apostolic

council described in Acts 15 and offers a final authoritative ruling that he expects to be disseminated and accepted by Christians everywhere (Acts 15:19–29; 21:25).

James's importance as a leader in the church is also acknowledged by Paul in Galatians, albeit somewhat grudgingly (Gal. 1:19; 2:6, 9). Paul disagreed sharply with James's policies regarding the continued relevance of certain markers of Jewish identity within the Christian community (Gal. 2:11–14). Still, he devoted a considerable portion of his ministry to supervising a collection for Christians in Jerusalem, where James was the recognized leader (Rom. 15:25–29; 2 Cor. 8–9).

The Jewish historian Josephus reports that James was murdered in 62 (see *Jewish Antiquities* 20.199–201). During an interim between on-site Roman rulers (when “Festus was dead and Albinus was still on the way”), the high priest Ananus II seized the opportunity to move against those whom he considered to be lawbreakers. He convened the judges of the Sanhedrin and delivered James and certain others to be stoned. Josephus notes that “the inhabitants of the city who were considered to be the most fair-minded and who were strict in their observance of the law were offended at this.” Furthermore, Josephus maintains that the action was judged to be illegal, and Ananus II subsequently was deposed by the new procurator on this account. A later Christian tradition, reported by Clement of Alexandria (third century), says that James was killed by

being thrown off the pinnacle of the temple, but this account is generally regarded as legendary.

Other traditions about James emphasize his traditional Jewish piety and his devotion to the law. Eusebius (fourth century) reports that he received his nickname “the Just” because he lived as a Nazirite, an ascetic who was especially devoted to God. Another oft-repeated tradition (reported by Eusebius) holds that James spent so much time praying in the temple that his knees became as calloused as those of a camel.

The apocryphal *Gospel of Thomas* (first or second century) contains an overwhelmingly positive affirmation of James. In one curious passage, Jesus’s disciples ask him who their leader will be after he departs; he answers, “You are to go to James the Just, for whose sake heaven and earth came into being” (*Gospel of Thomas* 12).

We have only a little information about the other brothers of Jesus. Paul refers to them as Christian missionaries, noting specifically that (unlike him) they were married and often accompanied by their wives (1 Cor. 9:5). Judas (= Jude) is the putative author of another New Testament letter.

25.8

James and the Wisdom Tradition (Box 25.3)

The Letter of James exhibits these common features of wisdom literature.

James Tries to Reason with His Readers

- He uses expressions such as “Come now, you who say . . .” (4:13) and “Come now, you rich people . . .” (5:1).
- His letter is peppered with words such as “because” and “for,” which introduce reasons for the points that he is making (1:3, 20, 23; 2:10–11, 13, 26; 3:1–2, 16; 4:14), and words such as “therefore” and “so,” which introduce conclusions to be derived from what he has said (1:21; 2:17, 23; 4:12, 17; 5:7, 16).
- Sometimes James asks his readers to consider the benefit or profit of their actions: “What good is it?” (2:14); “What is the good of that?” (2:16; see also 1:16, 20, 26; 2:20, 26; 4:5).

James Uses Secular Images Drawn from the World at

Large

- the billowing sea (1:6)
- the scorching sun (1:11)
- a reflection in a mirror (1:23–24)
- a bit in a horse’s mouth (3:3)

- a ship's rudder (3:4)
- a forest fire (3:5)
- domestication of animals (3:7)
- a freshwater spring (3:11)
- a fig tree (3:12)
- a grapevine (3:12)
- salt water (3:12)
- a vanishing mist (4:14)
- the rainy seasons for crops (5:7)

In both of these ways, James presents his teaching as “common sense”: he is advocating the wisest course of action, as should be obvious from logical reasoning and observation of nature.

25.9

James in the Christian Canon

The Letter of James was one of the last books of the New Testament admitted to the Christian canon. It was not listed in the Muratorian Canon of Scripture for the Western church (ca. 170–210). More than a hundred years later (ca. 311), Eusebius reported that it was still one of the disputed books, though he thought that it should be accepted because it was recognized by many, evinced an “apostolic style,” and was orthodox in its teaching. Although no one rejected the book outright, many authorities were hesitant to allow it full canonical status until Athanasius included it in a definitive list developed around 367. Under the influence of Athanasius and Augustine, Jerome included James in his early fifth-century translation of the Bible, the Latin Vulgate (which secured the letter’s place in the canon of the Western church). Jerome noted, however, that the book had only come to be accepted “little by little” (*De viris illustribus* 2). The Letter of James has been found in Christian Bibles ever since, but Martin Luther moved it to the back of his 1522 German Bible in order to distinguish it from what he regarded as the more “true and certain” books of the New Testament.

The reasons why James was slow to be accepted into the canon are not clear, but several factors are possible:

- there was uncertainty about authorship

- the book was popular among groups deemed to be heretical
- its contents may have seemed practical and generic rather than theological and specifically Christian
- parts of James (2:21–24) appeared to conflict with Paul (cf. Rom. 4:3–25; Gal. 3:6–14)
- the book has a very Jewish flavor, which probably did not help its reception in an increasingly gentile (and often anti-Jewish) church

25.10

Jerome on the Authorship of James (Box 25.2)

Jerome, the fourth-century scholar responsible for producing the Vulgate (a Latin translation of the Bible), indicates that the authorship of James was debated in his day, though he did not seem troubled by that fact:

James, who is called the brother of the Lord . . . wrote a single epistle, which is reckoned among the seven Catholic Epistles and even this is claimed by some to have been published by some one else under his name, and gradually, as time went on, to have gained authority.¹

1. Jerome, *Lives of Illustrious Men 2*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 2*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (1890–1900; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 3:361.

25.11

An “Epistle of Straw”: What Martin Luther Said about James

Though this Epistle of St. James was rejected by the ancients, I praise it and hold it a good book, because it sets up no doctrine of men and lays great stress upon God’s law. But to state my own opinion about it . . . I consider that it is not the writing of any apostle. My reasons are as follows. First: Flatly against St. Paul and all the rest of Scripture, it ascribes righteousness to works. . . . Second, its purpose is to teach Christians, and in all this long teaching it does not once mention the Passion, the Resurrection, or the Spirit of Christ. . . . James does nothing more than drive to the law and its works; and he mixes the two up in such disorderly fashion that it seems to me he must have been some good, pious man, who took some sayings of the apostles’ disciples and threw them thus on paper; or perhaps they were written down by someone else from his preaching. . . . In a word, he wants to guard against those who relied on faith without works, and is unequal to the task . . . and would accomplish by insisting on the Law what the apostles accomplish by inciting men to love. Therefore, I cannot put him among the chief books, though I would not thereby prevent anyone from putting him where he pleases and estimating him as he pleases; for there are many good sayings in him.¹

In a word, St. John's Gospel and his first epistle, St. Paul's epistles, especially Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians, and St. Peter's first epistle are the books that show you Christ and teach you all that it is necessary and salvatory for you to know, even if you were never to see or hear any other book or doctrine. St. James' epistle is really an epistle of straw, compared to the others, for it has nothing of the nature of the gospel about it.²

1. See *Luther's Works*, vol. 35, *Word and Sacrament I* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1960), 362.

2. *Luther's Works*, 395–97.

25.12

Authorship of James

Three views regarding the authorship of James have been expounded: (1) the letter was written by an unknown person named “James”; (2) the letter was written, as tradition holds, by James of Jerusalem, the brother of Jesus; (3) the letter was written pseudonymously by someone using the name of James of Jerusalem, the brother of Jesus.

James as the Work of an “Unknown James”

This suggestion that the author is an “unknown James” seizes on the fact that the author does not actually identify himself as “the brother of Jesus” or as the leader of the church in Jerusalem. Hypothetically, he could be anyone named “James” who considered himself to be a servant of Christ (1:1). Thus the letter could have been written by someone otherwise unknown to us. This view has had prominent supporters, including Martin Luther, but it is not widely held today.

The main attraction of this proposal is that it accounts for the problems scholars have with regarding James of Jerusalem as the author (see below) without alleging pseudonymity—an allegation that is offensive to those who regard the practice as deceptive or dishonest. Still, the author of this letter clearly expects his readers to know which James he is, and he seems to be writing to a broad audience, assuming that they will regard his words as authoritative.

Most scholars throughout history have concluded that the readers surely are expected to regard such words as the teaching of the only James who is ever called a pillar of the church (Gal. 2:9). Such a conclusion becomes even more likely if the letter is addressed to Christians living outside Palestine (James 1:1 [see EXPLORE 24.9]) by a church leader who presumably is within Palestine, where James of Jerusalem was in charge. Thus some modern scholars grant the possibility that the letter could have been written by an unknown Christian named James, but most consider this unlikely; the great majority thinks that the author must either be James of Jerusalem or someone using his name.

James as the Work of James, the Brother of Jesus

Interpreters who accept the traditional view that the letter really was written by James of Jerusalem, the brother of Jesus, emphasize points of continuity with traditions that would have been known by that individual. The author of this letter was familiar with Jewish wisdom literature, and James, leading the church in Jerusalem, could easily have become immersed in the wisdom tradition. The author of this letter also evinces knowledge of “Jesus sayings,” and obviously, the brother of Jesus would have had firsthand knowledge of things that Jesus taught and said. In addition, the letter’s sensitivity to the poor and its emphasis on economic equality (1:9–11; 2:1–7; 5:1–6) fit well with what is said elsewhere about James

(Gal. 2:10) and the Jerusalem church (Acts 2:44–45; 4:34–37; 5:1–11; 6:1).

In a broader sense, many references in this letter are said to be suggestive of Palestinian conditions: the mention of early and late rain (James 5:7) is appropriate for the climate, the references to figs and olives and grapes (3:12) match the produce, and the descriptions of economic exploitation (2:5–7; 5:1–6) match what is known of inequities in the land during this time period. None of these points clinches the deal or proves that the letter is by James the brother of Jesus, but they do offer evidence that coheres with the letter's self-claim.

James as a Pseudepigraphical Composition

The possibility that the letter is pseudepigraphical is at least suggested by the fact that we have copies of four other writings from early Christianity attributed to James that clearly were not written by him: the *Protevangelium of James*, the *Apocryphon of James*, the *First Apocalypse of James*, and the *Second Apocalypse of James*. The first of these (written ca. 150) became a very popular book in Christian circles, being the first major writing to encourage the veneration of Mary and testifying to her perpetual virginity. The latter three writings are gnostic works found among the Nag Hammadi collection. Although none of these writings makes for a fair comparison with the first-century, Jewish-flavored letter attributed to

James found in our New Testament, they do attest to how James was a popular choice for pseudonymous attribution.

Scholars who think that the New Testament Letter of James might be pseudepigraphical raise a number of objections to its ascription to James of Jerusalem, the brother of Jesus.

The Letter's Greek Flavor

The letter is written in elegant Greek, and when the author refers to the Scriptures, he appears to be reading from the Septuagint (a Greek translation) rather than from the original Hebrew (see, e.g., 4:6, citing Prov. 3:34). The letter also makes use of concepts and rhetoric derived from Greek philosophy (e.g., the diatribe). Many scholars question whether a Jewish peasant from Galilee would have been capable of writing such a letter. And, even if he were, why would he write it in Greek rather than in Aramaic or in Hebrew (especially if it were addressed to other Jewish believers)?

Supporters of the traditional view point out that Palestine was largely Hellenized at this time; the Greek language was widely used, and elements of Greek philosophy had worked their way into the culture. They also caution against writing James off as “an ignorant peasant,” since it is a historical fact that he led the church in Jerusalem for many years and was able to hold his own in conversations and conflicts with Paul (Gal. 1:18–2:12). Further, we might assume that someone of James’s stature would have been able to secure an amanuensis to produce a letter in keeping with his wishes and that

such a scribe (a person with training in rhetoric and composition) would have taken responsibility for presenting the author's thoughts in a way that was considered to be effective and pleasing according to the standards of the day.

No Relationship Claimed

The author does not make any reference to the personal life of Jesus or even bother to identify himself as the brother of Jesus. Wouldn't he want to cite his relationship with Jesus to give his teaching more authority?

Interpreters who support the traditional ascription claim that the author did not have to do this (his readers knew who he was), and he probably avoided flaunting his credentials as "the Lord's brother" (cf. Gal. 1:19) because it would be considered unseemly to do so (cf. Jude 1:1). Notably, James is never explicitly referred to as the brother of Jesus in Acts either. Indeed, this point may be turned on its head: Wouldn't a pseudonymous author, trying to capitalize on James's authority and notoriety, have been careful to spell out who he was (i.e., who he was claiming to be), and to milk that for all it was worth? Wouldn't a pseudonymous author claim the letter was by James the "brother of Jesus" rather than by James "a servant of Jesus" (cf. 1:1)?

No Concern for Torah

The letter does not display the same concern for Jewish Christians to abide by Torah and to keep ritual laws (including dietary

regulations) that we would expect to find in a writing from James, given that such insistence is what precipitated the conflict with Paul at Antioch (Gal. 2:11–14). When the author of this letter refers to the love commandment as “the law of liberty” (1:25; 2:12), he seems to endorse the position taken by Paul with regard to that controversy: Christians fulfill the whole law when they keep the love command, and thus they are freed from other laws (Gal. 5:13–14). This is often regarded as the strongest argument against this letter actually being written by James of Jerusalem, the brother of Jesus.

Supporters of the traditional view point out that the argument is based entirely on silence. The author could very well have thought that Jewish Christians should observe dietary and other regulations of Torah but did not address those matters in this particular missive because they did not happen to be concerns at that moment.

When Was Letter Written?

The section of the letter that maintains that justification comes by works, not by faith alone (2:14–26), is usually thought to have been written in response to a misunderstanding of Paul’s teaching on the topic of justification by faith (Rom. 3:28; Gal. 2:16). Thus, scholars claim, the Letter of James must have been written later than Paul, and probably several years later to allow time for Paul’s views to have circulated and become widely known. By this reasoning, the letter must be written later than 62, when James the brother of Jesus was killed.

Other interpreters claim that a misunderstanding of Paul's teaching actually suggests an early date. James may have heard garbled reports of what Paul was saying and written this letter to counter ideas that probably would have been understood more clearly a few years later. The letter could have been written during the time of Paul's active ministry, around the same time as Galatians and Romans, or even before those letters, which spell out Paul's teaching on justification in a way distinct from the caricature that the Letter of James appears to be addressing.

Not Approved Early On

The Letter of James was one of the last books admitted to the Christian canon. Some scholars say that if the early church had been confident that this book was written by Jesus's own brother, there would have been unanimous approval of it from the start; the slow and halting acceptance of the book is a sure sign that there was uncertainty regarding its author.

Other scholars suggest that authorship was not the primary issue with regard to the book's being accepted as Scripture: even teachers of the church who accepted this book as written by James the brother of Jesus were wary of it because it was favored by legalistic sects and movements that lay outside the mainstream of developing orthodoxy (e.g., the Ebionites in the second century and the Pelagians in the fourth century).

The Mention of Offices

The letter is sometimes thought to assume a developed church structure that would not have been in place during the lifetime of James. The roles of “teacher” (3:1) and “elder” (5:14–15) apparently have been elevated to the status of recognized church offices.

Supporters of the traditional view maintain that we have no sure information regarding when such offices developed in the church. Paul refers to bishops and deacons (Phil. 1:1; cf. Rom. 16:1) and other authorities (1 Cor. 12:28; 1 Thess. 5:12) in letters written during the lifetime of James.

Conclusion

Most scholars grant that there is no decisive reason why James of Jerusalem, the brother of Jesus, could not be the author of this letter, as the ascription in 1:1 is almost certainly meant to imply. Still, others believe that the cumulative weight of all the different considerations mentioned above make it more likely that the letter was written pseudonymously by someone who revered James and wanted to pass along teaching coherent with the image of pious Jewish Christianity with which James had come to be associated.

Ultimately, the decision on this question may be determined by the attitude that one takes toward tradition and toward pseudepigraphy in general.

- Scholars who tend to respect the reliability of ancient church traditions and who think that pseudepigraphy typically was regarded as a spurious practice usually conclude that the Letter of James can be attributed with some confidence to the actual brother of Jesus and leader of the Jerusalem church.
- Scholars who tend to be suspicious of church traditions, or who think that pseudepigraphy was a common and accepted practice, usually conclude that James is a pseudepigraphical work, produced with the best of intentions as a tribute to the great church leader.

In neither case is James regarded as a deceitful forgery; the content of the letter evinces high moral values and it is hard to imagine what a dishonest person would hope to gain by producing such a work fraudulently.

25.13

Was James the Son of Joseph and Mary?

The New Testament simply identifies James as the brother of Jesus without any further specification of family relationships. At first, this seems to indicate that Jesus's parents, Joseph and Mary, had more children in the years after Jesus was born. But, from the second century on, some interpreters have demonstrated that there could be other explanations for how Jesus came to have brothers and sisters. The siblings of Jesus mentioned in Mark 6:4 may have been Joseph's children from a previous marriage (which, if so, means that James was older than Jesus). Or, Joseph and Mary may have adopted children, possibly the orphaned offspring of relatives.

These suggestions appear to be motivated by a desire to preserve the virginity of Mary: in the developing piety of the Christian church, Mary came to be viewed as "forever virgin," and eventually her perpetual virginity was affirmed as a point of sacred doctrine for the Roman Catholic Church. Thus Roman Catholic interpreters tend to regard Jesus and James as legal siblings but not as blood relatives. Most Protestant interpreters view this as a nonissue: the Roman Catholic position on James and the other siblings of Jesus is possible, but it is not supported by anything in the Bible or made necessary by any (Protestant) theological doctrine.

See Richard Bauckham, *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus in the Early Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990).

25.14

Twelve Tribes in the Dispersion (Box 25.4)

The Letter of James is addressed to “the twelve tribes in the Dispersion.” What does that mean? For Christians, these terms had both literal and metaphorical levels of meaning.

	Literal	Metaphorical
Twelve tribes	Jewish descendants of Abraham	Christians, who are the new Israel, under the twelve apostles
Dispersion	Jews who live outside Palestine	Christians who live on earth, apart from their home in heaven

Most scholars think that James uses these words in a way that combines the literal and metaphorical senses. The letter was written not for Jews (the “twelve tribes” in a literal sense) but rather for Christians (2:1). Still, it may have been written for Jewish Christians (i.e., Christians who belong to the literal twelve tribes), or at least for Christians who have a strong appreciation of their Jewish heritage. And as for the Dispersion, even if the letter can be read as speaking generically to Christians who live anywhere on earth (in a diaspora from heaven), its original application may have been for Christians who lived outside Palestine, where the Jesus movement had begun.

25.15

The Royal Command of Love (Box 25.6)

The Letter of James does not just contain teaching similar to the sayings of Jesus; it also adopts the hermeneutic of Jesus, maintaining that love is the key to fulfilling God's law and doing God's will.

Jesus said that love for God and love for neighbor are the greatest commandments, the ones on which "all the law and the prophets" depend (Matt. 22:36–40; cf. Mark 12:29–31; Luke 10:25–28). He summarized ethics with what has come to be known as the Golden Rule: "Do to others as you would have them do to you" (Matt. 7:12).

James likewise identifies "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19:18) as "the royal law" (2:8), "the law of liberty" (1:25; 2:12), and "the perfect law" (1:25). Faced with the prospect of keeping the whole law, with all its various points, believers do well to concentrate on this commandment (2:8–10).

James further interprets this royal law in context. He appears to have examined the Old Testament section in which the command to love one's neighbor appears and incorporated more of what that part of the Bible says into his moral exhortations:

- Leviticus 19:12 forbids swearing false oaths (cf. James 5:12)
- Leviticus 19:13 forbids withholding wages from laborers (cf. James 5:4).

- Leviticus 19:15 forbids showing partiality to the rich (cf. James 2:1–12).
- Leviticus 19:16 forbids slander and evil talk (cf. James 4:11–12).
- Leviticus 19:17 commends reproof as a way to reconciliation (cf. James 5:20).
- Leviticus 19:18a discourages vengeance and grudge-holding (cf. James 5:9).
- Leviticus 19:18b says to love neighbor as self (cf. James 2:8).

See Luke Timothy Johnson, *Brother of Jesus, Friend of God: Studies in the Letter of James* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 123–35.

25.16

James 1:27—Abraham Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address (Box 25.8)

President Abraham Lincoln alluded to James 1:27 in what could be his second most famous speech (after that little address at Gettysburg):

With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation’s wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.

He and the nation were specifically mindful of the widows and orphans of fallen Civil War soldiers.

The full verse in James reads, “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.”

26.0

1 Peter: Outline of Contents

- I. Letter opening (1:1–9)
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C. Farewell (5:14)

Courtesy of *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, ed. Mark Allan Powell (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 785.

26.1

1 Peter in the Revised Common Lectionary

Text	Series	Liturgical Occasion	Calendar Date
1:3–9	A	Easter 2	1 Sunday after Easter
1:17–23	A	Easter 3	2 Sundays after Easter
2:2–10	A	Easter 5	4 Sundays after Easter
2:19–25	A	Easter 4	3 Sundays after Easter
3:13–22	A	Easter 6	5 Sundays after Easter
3:18–22	B	Lent 1	6 Sundays before Easter
4:12–14; 5:6–11	A	Easter 7	6 Sundays after Easter

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26.3

Parallels between 1 Peter and Other New Testament Writings (Box 26.2)

1 Peter	Other Writings
1:1	Heb. 11:13; James 1:1
1:2	Heb. 12:24
1:3	Eph. 1:3
1:3–5	Titus 3:4–7
1:4	Matt. 6:20
1:6–7	Rom. 5:3–5; James 1:2–3
1:10–12	Eph. 3:2–6
1:12	Matt. 13:17
1:14	Rom. 12:2; Eph. 2:2–3
1:17	Luke 11:2
1:20	Eph. 1:4
1:22	Rom. 12:9–10
1:23–2:2	James 1:10–11, 18–22
2:1	Eph. 4:25, 31; Titus 3:1; James 1:21
2:2–6	Eph. 2:18–22
2:5	Rom. 12:1
2:6–8	Rom. 9:32–33
2:7	Matt. 21:42
2:9	Titus 2:14; Rev. 1:6; 5:10
2:10	Rom. 9:25
2:11	Heb. 11:13; James 4:1
2:12	Matt. 5:16
2:13–17	Rom. 13:1–7
2:16	Gal. 5:13
2:19–20	Luke 6:32–33
2:24	Rom. 6:2, 11; Heb. 10:10
2:25	Heb. 13:20
3:1	Eph. 5:22
3:1–6	1 Tim. 2:9–11
3:8–9	Rom. 12:16–17
3:9	Luke 6:28; Heb. 12:17

3:14	Matt. 5:10
3:18	Rom. 6:10; Eph. 2:18; Heb. 9:28
3:22	Eph. 1:20–22; Col. 2:15
4:8	James 5:20
4:10–11	Rom. 12:6–7
4:13	Matt. 5:10
4:14	Matt. 5:11; Heb. 13:13
5:2	Acts 20:28
5:4	Heb. 13:20
5:5–9	James 4:6–10

26.4

Images for the Church in 1 Peter (Box 26.4)

- *the Dispersion*—exiles on earth, separated from the true home in heaven (1:1, 17; 2:11)
- *the new Israel*—a chosen race and a holy nation (2:9; cf. Deut. 7:6; 10:15; Isa. 43:20); God’s own people (2:9; cf. Exod. 19:5; Isa. 43:21)
- *a priesthood of all believers*—a holy priesthood (2:5); a royal priesthood (2:9; cf. Exod. 19:6)
- *a living temple*—a spiritual house made of living stones where spiritual sacrifices are offered (2:5; cf. 1 Cor. 3:16)
- *a flock of sheep*—tended by pastors (= shepherds) with Christ as chief shepherd (2:25; 5:3–4; cf. John 10:11; 21:15–19; Acts 20:28; Isa. 40:11; Ezek. 34:12)
- *a woman*—“your sister church in Babylon” (5:13), referring to an individual congregation as a woman (literally, “she who is in Babylon”; cf. 2 John 1)

26.5

1 Peter 3:1–7 and Other Household Tables in the New Testament

The New Testament letters contains several *Haustafeln* (“household tables”), a literary form that was common in the Greco-Roman world. Here are three of the best-known examples. See also 1 Timothy 2:8–15; 5:1–2; 6:1–2; Titus 2:1–10. Also see two letters by early Christian leaders that are not found in the New Testament: *1 Clement* 1:3; 21:6–9; Polycarp, *To the Philippians* 4:1–6:2).

Ephesians 5:21–6:9

5:21 Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.

22 Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord.

23 For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior. **24** Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands.

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, **26** in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, **27** so as to present the church to himself in splendor, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind—yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish. **28** In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. **29** For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, **30** because we are members of his body. **31** “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” **32** This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church. **33** Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband.

6:1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

2 “Honor your father and mother”—this is the first commandment with a promise: **3** “so that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.”

4 And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

5 Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, in

singleness of heart, as you obey Christ; **6** not only while being watched, and in order to please them, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. **7** Render service with enthusiasm, as to the Lord and not to men and women, **8** knowing that whatever good we do, we will receive the same again from the Lord, whether we are slaves or free.

9 And, masters, do the same to them. Stop threatening them, for you know that both of you have the same Master in heaven, and with him there is no partiality.

Colossians 3:18–4:1

3:18 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. **19** Husbands, love your wives and never treat them harshly.

20 Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is your acceptable duty in the Lord. **21** Fathers, do not provoke your children, or they may lose heart. **22** Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything, not only while being watched and in order to please them, but wholeheartedly, fearing the Lord.

23 Whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord and not for your masters, **24** since you know that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you serve the Lord Christ. **25** For the wrongdoer will be paid back for whatever wrong has been done, and there is no partiality. **4:1** Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, for you know that you also have a Master in heaven.

1 Peter 3:1–7

3:1 Wives, in the same way, accept the authority of your husbands, so that, even if some of them do not obey the word, they may be won over without a word by their wives' conduct, **2** when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. **3** Do not adorn yourselves outwardly by braiding your hair, and by wearing gold ornaments or fine clothing; **4** rather, let your adornment be the inner self with the lasting beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in God's sight. **5** It was in this way long ago that the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves by accepting the authority of their husbands. **6** Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham and called him lord. You have become her daughters as long as you do what is good and never let fears alarm you.

7 Husbands, in the same way, show consideration for your wives in your life together, paying honor to the woman as the weaker sex, since they too are also heirs of the gracious gift of life—so that nothing may hinder your prayers.

26.6

Silvanus and Mark in 1 Peter (Box 26.3)

Two of Paul's colleagues appear to be associated with the writing of 1 Peter.

- *Silvanus*. The letter from Peter is to be delivered to churches by Silvanus (5:12). This probably is the same Silvanus (= Silas) who, according to the book of Acts, previously was entrusted with delivering a different circular letter following the apostolic council (see Acts 15:22–29). Elsewhere in the New Testament, Silvanus/Silas is closely linked with Paul (Acts 15:40; 17:14–15; 18:5; 2 Cor. 1:19) and is even listed as coauthor of two Pauline letters (1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1).
- *Mark*. Peter sends greetings to the churches from Mark, who is identified as Peter's "son" (5:13). The latter ascription usually has been taken metaphorically, and this "Mark" traditionally has been identified with John Mark, whose mother knew Peter in Jerusalem (Acts 12:11–12). This Mark, a relative of Barnabas (Col. 4:10), had also been a colleague of Paul for a time, but Paul became dissatisfied with him and replaced him with none other than Silvanus/Silas (see Acts 12:25; 15:37, 39; cf. 2 Tim. 4:11; Philem. 24).

26.7

The Weaker Vessel: Women and Wives in 1 Peter

(Box 26.5)

One passage in 1 Peter instructs men to show consideration to their wives, “paying honor to the woman as the weaker sex” (3:7). Such language may strike modern readers as quaint or ill-advised. Peter’s intentions may be noble, but most women do not like being referred to as “the weaker sex.” In the ancient world, of course, such inferiority could be, and often was, stated without controversy. Plato declares, “A woman is weaker than a man” (*Republic* 5.455D).¹

The expression used in 3:7 literally means “the weaker vessel.” The word vessel (*skeuos*) comes from pottery (cf. 2 Cor. 4:7; 1 Thess. 4:4). Peter’s point seems to be that men and women are like clay jars that hold God’s precious gift of life: both are fragile, but the female vessel tends to be even more frail. The only point of comparison seems to be physical strength, since the preceding verses (3:1–2) indicate that wives may be stronger than their husbands in other ways (e.g., spiritually or intellectually or morally). Of course, healthy women sometimes are physically stronger than less-healthy men, but the basic point seems to be that men should typically be courteous and considerate of women with regard to workload and other matters that could strain or damage the physical body.

In a broader sense, the reference may be applied to “social power.” Within Roman society, men had certain rights and privileges that women did not. Peter may have been noting that men, who often are physically stronger than women, also possess more power in society. Given this situation (which he neither blesses nor critiques), he urges men to “show consideration” to women and to “honor” them as joint heirs of God’s grace. In other words, men are to yield power to women, granting them an equality in Christ that is not recognized by society at large (cf. Gal. 3:28).

1. Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Paul Shorey, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969).

26.8

Martyrdom of Peter (Box 26.1)

Christian tradition holds that Peter was martyred in Rome under the emperor Nero, that he was put to death by crucifixion, and, specifically, that he was crucified upside down.

The Gospel of John records a prediction by Jesus concerning “the kind of death” by which Peter would glorify God: “When you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go” (21:18–19). The reference to outstretched hands seems like an allusion to crucifixion (though not, actually, to upside-down crucifixion).

Around the year 96, the bishop Clement writes from Rome, “Because of jealousy and envy the greatest and most upright pillars were persecuted, and they struggled in the contest even to death. . . . Peter bore up under hardships not just once or twice, but many times; and having thus borne his witness he went to the place of glory that he deserved” (*1 Clement* 5:2–4).¹

About one hundred years later, Tertullian states that Nero was the one responsible for the apostles’ deaths (*Antidote for the Scorpion’s Sting* 15). He refers to Rome as a fortunate church “where Peter endures a passion like his Lord’s! where Paul wins his crown in a death like John’s!” (*Prescription against Heretics* 36).² The reference to Peter having a “passion like that of the Lord” probably refers,

again, to crucifixion (Paul's death was like that of John the Baptist, because he was beheaded).

The idea that Peter was crucified upside down actually comes from the apocryphal *Acts of Peter*, a fanciful second-century work that usually is given little credibility by religious scholars. In this case, however, the work devotes several paragraphs to explaining why Peter was crucified in this manner: Peter himself requested it because it would convey an elaborate and esoteric symbolism likening his death to a birth process, with imagery supposedly recalling Adam. This all seems way too complicated and not at all persuasive—but that simply begs the question of what the author of this work hoped to gain by such far-fetched explanations. Many scholars surmise that the author never would have brought the matter up at all unless there was something that needed to be explained.

Elsewhere, the Roman historian Josephus does note that soldiers sometimes amused themselves by crucifying criminals in different positions as a means to further their humiliation. Thus it is possible that the *Acts of Peter* did not invent this detail about Peter's death but rather tried (somewhat desperately) to supply theological reasons for something that many Christians knew and found traumatic. Thus the upside-down crucifixion of Peter might be regarded as an actual historical event that went unmentioned in

earlier sources whose authors hoped that the detail could be forgotten.

1. Bart D. Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers*, vol.1, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 43, 45.

2. *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, 10 vols., (1885–96; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986–89), 3:260.

26.9

Postscript to 1 Peter: Persecution in Bithynia- Pontus (Box 26.6)

What became of the Christians to whom 1 Peter was addressed?

Around 112, Pliny the Younger, a Roman governor, wrote to the emperor Trajan concerning the status of Christianity in Bithynia-Pontus, two of the areas named in 1 Peter 1:1. Pliny's letter provides information about the churches addressed by 1 Peter a few decades later.

On the one hand, we learn that the church in this region has continued to grow and prosper. Pliny notes that "many persons of every age, every rank, and also of both sexes" were associated with the faith, and he complains that "the contagion of this superstition has spread not only to the cities but also to the villages and farms."

On the other hand, it is clear that the suffering of the believers has also increased, for now they are experiencing deliberate persecution at the instigation of the Roman state. Pliny reports:

The method I have observed towards those who have been brought before me as Christians is this: I asked them whether they were Christians; if they admitted it . . . I ordered them to be at once punished: for I was persuaded, whatever the nature of their opinions might be, a contumacious and inflexible obstinacy certainly deserved correction. . . .

An anonymous information was laid before me containing a charge against several persons, who upon examination denied they were Christians, or had ever been so. They repeated after me an invocation to the gods, and offered religious rites with wine and incense before your statue . . . and even reviled the name of Christ: whereas there is no forcing, it is said, those who are really Christians into any of these compliances: I thought it proper, therefore, to discharge them.

Some among those who were accused . . . at first confessed themselves Christians, but immediately after denied it; the rest owned indeed that they had been of that number formerly, but had now . . . renounced that error. . . .

After receiving this account, I judged it so much the more necessary to endeavor to extort the real truth, by putting two female slaves to the torture, who were said to officiate in their religious rites: but all I could discover was evidence of an absurd and extravagant superstition.¹

1. A. N. Sherwin-White, *The Letters of Pliny* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966).

26.10

1 Peter 3:3–5 and Plutarch on the Virtue of Modesty for Women

The First Letter of Peter offers the following counsel for women:

Do not adorn yourselves outwardly by braiding your hair, and by wearing gold ornaments or fine clothing; rather, let your adornment be the inner self with the lasting beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in God's sight. It was in this way long ago that the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves by accepting the authority of their husbands. (1 Pet. 3:3–5)

The Roman world in general prized modesty and simplicity as primary virtues for women. Thus Plutarch pulls out all the stops in offering this high praise to his wife:

Your plainness of attire and sober style of living has without exception amazed every philosopher who has shared our society and intimacy, neither is there any townsman of ours to whom at religious ceremonies, sacrifices, and the theatre you do not offer another spectacle—your own simplicity. (*Moralia*, “Consolation to His Wife” 609C)¹

1. Plutarch, *Moralia*, “Consolation to His Wife,” trans. Frank Cole Babbitt (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), 589.

26.11

1 Peter in the Christian Canon

The Muratorian Canon (ca. 170–210), our earliest written list of books regarded as Scripture in the Christian church, does not list 1 Peter. This is strange because the book was already well known in the church at that time, and if it was regarded as noncanonical by the composers of this list, they almost certainly would have mentioned it as a book to be rejected, as they do other apocryphal writings that had attained popularity. The canonical status of 1 Peter is not questioned in any other document of the church, as is the status of the four other New Testament writings missing from the Muratorian Canon (Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 3 John). Furthermore, the identification of the letter's author as the apostle Peter found unanimous acceptance in the early church and has been questioned only in recent times.

Accordingly, some scholars think that the omission of 1 Peter from the Muratorian Canon is accidental: the manuscript containing that list is fragmentary, so it is possible that 1 Peter was listed in a portion of the manuscript that is missing (though this would mean that it was listed in an odd sequence, not with other epistles). No one really knows why 1 Peter was not included in this one early list of canonical books, but the fourth-century historian Eusebius lists it as an “undisputed work” that has been “acknowledged as genuine and true by the tradition of the church” (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.25, 1–7).

26.12

What John Calvin Said about Women as “the Weaker Sex”

Text of 1 Peter 3:7

Husbands, in the same way, show consideration for your wives in your life together, paying honor to the woman as the weaker sex, since they too are also heirs of the gracious gift of life.

Commentary by John Calvin (1509–64)

The French theologian and Reformer interpreted this passage in light of an earlier comment to the effect that “the quiet and gentle spirit” of a woman is “very precious in God’s sight” (1 Pet. 3:4). Thus he concluded that women are deserving of special consideration because they are simultaneous physically inferior but spiritual superior to men:

Peter employs a two-fold argument, to persuade husbands to treat their wives honorably and kindly. The first is derived from the (physical) weakness of the sex; the other from the honor with which God favors them. These things seem in a way to be contrary, that consideration ought to be given to wives because they are weak, and also because they excel—but where love abounds, these things well agree together. (*Commentary* sup. 1 Pet. 3:7)¹

1. John Calvin, *Commentary* sup. 1 Peter 3:7, trans. John Owen. Available online at numerous sites, including rcbi-resoures.yolasite.com.

26.13

Authorship of 1 Peter

In the 1950s and 1960s, the great majority of New Testament scholars regarded 1 Peter as an obviously pseudepigraphical writing, but that judgment was based on arguments that would be deemed inconclusive today.

Arguments for Pseudepigraphy That No Longer Hold Up

- *Argument*: The sufferings referred to in 1 Peter are references to state-sponsored, empirewide persecutions, which did not occur during the apostle Peter's lifetime.
- *Rebuttal*: There is now widespread recognition that the letter is addressing suffering of another kind (harassment and abuse from neighbors), which could have been experienced almost anytime, anywhere.
- *Argument*: The relatively refined Greek of 1 Peter is beyond what we would expect of a Galilean fisherman (cf. Acts 4:13). The author, furthermore, cites Old Testament passages from the Septuagint without, apparently, consulting the Hebrew Bible. He also demonstrates some knowledge of Greco-Roman rhetorical practices.
- *Rebuttal*: Most modern scholars recognize that letter writers in the ancient world often employed professional scribes who were

responsible for the actual composition, conveying what the author wanted to say in a more polished style than the author might have been able to produce. This was particularly true when the author was a person of prominence (as Peter would have been) who was writing an official communication like this one (a circular letter to multiple churches). Furthermore, many scholars now contend that a well-traveled man like Peter could have had much more facility with Greek than was previously thought.

- *Argument*: The numerous parallels between 1 Peter and other New Testament books are evidence that the author of 1 Peter had read some of those books. Thus 1 Peter must be one of the last books of the New Testament to have been written, and accordingly, it could not have been written by the apostle, who died in the mid-60s.
- *Rebuttal*: Today most scholars think that the parallels can be attributed to mutual use of shared traditions (catechetical and liturgical materials). Furthermore, the connections most suggestive of direct literary dependence are ones that do not necessarily pose any problem for Petrine authorship. It is often noted that 1 Peter uses a number of “Paulinisms,” distinctive words and expressions usually associated with Paul; for example, the expression “in Christ” is used 164 times by Paul but does not occur anywhere else in the New Testament except here, in 1 Peter, where it turns up three times (3:16; 5:10, 14). That is

interesting, but it is not particularly relevant for the question of authorship, since there is no reason why Peter, in Rome, could not have read Paul's letter to the Romans and picked up some "Paulinisms" from that. Or he might have been influenced by Paul's former colleagues Silvanus and Mark, who, he says, are currently with him (5:12–13).

The major arguments that once led scholars to regard 1 Peter as pseudepigraphical have thus been discounted, and authorship by the apostle has increasingly come to be regarded as a viable option. The matter is still disputed by many (probably most) scholars, but with a different tenor than before. Almost everyone will at least admit that 1 Peter is not certainly or obviously pseudepigraphical.

Factors Favoring 1 Peter as a Work Produced during Peter's Lifetime

The encouragement to honor the emperor would make more sense before the persecutions under Nero than afterward: How could any Christian write words describing the Roman emperor as a promoter of justice (2:13–14) in the years after Peter's martyrdom, much less attribute those words retroactively to Peter himself? The confident declaration that the end of the ages is near (4:7; cf. 1:5; 4:17) also suggests the perspective of a first-generation Christian.

Factors Suggesting That 1 Peter Comes from a Time after Peter's Death

The use of “Babylon” as an epithet for Rome (5:13) did not become popular among Jews and Christians until after 70 CE, when Rome destroyed the Jerusalem temple, just as Babylon had destroyed an earlier temple in 587 BCE. A later date for 1 Peter also allows more time for various Christian trajectories to have synthesized into the common tradition that we find expressed in the letter. A later date also allows more time for the churches in Asia Minor to have developed into the established institutions that they appear to be.

Specific Proposals That Have Been Offered

Wayne Grudem suggests that, contrary to church tradition, Peter survived the Neronian persecution and wrote the letter sometime later (in the 70s?) with former colleagues of the deceased Paul now helping him.¹

E. G. Selwyn suggests that Silvanus (cf. 1 Pet. 5:12) shaped some fragmentary themes and exhortations of Peter’s into a coherent letter after the apostle’s death.²

Leonhard Goppelt suggests that the Roman church in the 80s had become so identified with Petrine tradition that it felt it could speak to other churches “with the mind of Peter” (and thus in his name).³

The Central Argument Today: Is the Letter Compatible with What Is Known of Peter?

The main question for most modern scholars is whether what is presented in 1 Peter is consistent with what we know of Peter’s post-

Easter life and teachings. There are things in the letter that do not match perfectly with what is said of Peter elsewhere in the New Testament. But how significant are these matters? And can they be explained?

There are the two most frequently cited examples.

Apostle to the Jews, Not to the Gentiles

Paul describes Peter as the “apostle to the circumcised” (Gal. 2:7–8), indicating that Peter was more focused on ministry to Jews than to gentiles; it is a little odd, then, that Peter would be writing a letter to gentile Christians. Still, we should not take Paul’s remark as providing us with some kind of permanent or binding job description for Peter. Elsewhere, we do hear that Peter was involved in church work at Antioch (Gal. 2:11–12) and at Corinth (1 Cor. 1:12; 9:5), which seems to imply some level of commitment to ministry among gentiles (and see Acts 10:1–11:18; 15:6–11).

No Mention of the Incident at Antioch

Paul refers to a confrontation he had with Peter in Antioch (Gal. 2:11–14), alleging that Peter acted hypocritically out of fear. One might think that Peter (writing also to the Galatians, among others) would now want to set the record straight and offer his version of what happened. But there is no mention in 1 Peter of the Antioch incident, nor is there any discussion of the issues that provoked it. That seems odd to some interpreters, but, of course, such an omission could simply indicate that the controversy had passed, or

that Peter and Paul had reconciled, or that Peter had accepted Paul's rebuke and now agreed with him. It could even be that Peter, following his own advice, simply chose not to return "abuse for abuse" (1 Pet. 3:9; cf. 2:23).

Where does this leave us? We do not really know very much about Peter's post-Easter career or teaching, save for the fact that he was a missionary who traveled with his wife (1 Cor. 9:5), that he was highly respected as a leader in the church (Gal. 1:18; 2:9), and that many people traced their identity in Christ to his ministry or influence (1 Cor. 1:12; cf. Acts 2:41; 4:4; 8:25). He does not seem to have been regarded as an innovative theologian or as one who was clearly identified with distinctive doctrines or practices. Even Paul seems to regard him as a key player in the church who is just one among many who are all basically doing the same thing: proclaiming the true gospel of Christ (1 Cor. 1:12; 3:22; 15:11).

The bottom line seems to be this: there is nothing in 1 Peter that necessitates it having been written by the apostle Peter; at the same time, there is nothing in the letter that makes authorship by Peter impossible.

The Two Key Factors Influencing Decisions

In adjudicating this question, two factors inevitably come to the fore.

The Degree of Confidence That Can Be Placed in Traditions of the Early Church

Scholars who view church tradition as “innocent unless proven guilty” usually judge 1 Peter to be an authentic composition of the apostle Peter (the problems raised are not sufficient to undermine a unanimous and early tradition of the church). Scholars who think that the early church often got such things wrong tend to think that the letter probably is pseudepigraphical.

The Attitude That the Early Church Took Toward Pseudepigraphy

Scholars who think that Christians in the early church usually regarded pseudepigraphy as a spurious or dishonest practice usually view 1 Peter as an authentic composition of the apostle Peter (the problems raised are outweighed by the unlikelihood of respected Christians in the first century producing a fraudulent work or managing to pull off such a hoax in a church that was cautious and watchful in that regard). Scholars who think that certain types of pseudepigraphy were widely accepted as honorable tend to see 1 Peter as pseudepigraphical (produced by disciples or admirers of Peter for a church that welcomed such postmortem contributions).

The Significance of the Question

The significance of whether 1 Peter is to be regarded as authentic or pseudepigraphical is minimized by certain factors:

- The letter does not claim to present anything that only Peter could know (e.g., secret teachings imparted to him by Jesus). The apocryphal writings attributed to Peter in later centuries often do make such a claim.
- Both defenders of authenticity and proponents of pseudonymity agree that the letter presents Peter's own thoughts (or, at least, thoughts consistent with the tradition in which he stood); they also agree that those thoughts have been cast into language different from that which Peter himself typically would have used (either by an amanuensis during his lifetime or by disciples after his death).
- The question of authorship need not be resolved to understand the letter's message, which is fairly general and intended to deal with issues faced by Christians "in all the world" (5:9).

Nevertheless, a few specific passages in this letter attain a special poignancy if written by the man Peter who actually walked with Jesus.

In 5:1, the author refers to himself as "a witness of the sufferings of Christ." This could simply mean that he is one who can testify faithfully to the sufferings that Christ bore and that others bear for him. The disciple Peter, however, may have meant this in a more literal sense: he speaks as one who was actually present to witness Christ's suffering firsthand (cf. 2:23).

In 1:8, the author writes, “Although you have not seen (Jesus), you love him.” The words might strike readers differently if written by someone who, unlike them, has in fact seen Jesus face-to-face.

In short, the question of whether 1 Peter is pseudepigraphical perhaps is irrelevant for understanding the book’s theological message, but the question could be significant for appreciation of the work’s emotional impact or sentimental appeal.

1. See Wayne Grudem, *The First Epistle of Peter*, TNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 10–11; cf. J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, WBC 49 (Waco: Word, 1988), lvii–lxvii.

2. See E. G. Selwyn, *The First Epistle of St. Peter*, 2nd ed., TC (1947; repr. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1981), 9–17.

3. See Leonhard Goppelt, *A Commentary on 1 Peter*, trans. John E. Alsup (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 51–52.

26.14

Resident Aliens: A Social Class?

One of the most influential studies on 1 Peter in recent years demonstrates that the terms used in this letter for “aliens and exiles” (*parepidēmos* in 1:1; 2:11; *paroikia* in 1:17; *paroikos* in 2:11) were used in the Roman world to refer to a particular social class of people with the legal status of “resident aliens.” Such persons lived without recognized citizenship; they were “homeless” in a social-cultural sense and often were subjected to abuse and oppression. This observation leads to the contention that 1 Peter was written to Christians who belonged to this marginalized social class. Many aspects of the letter may be understood from such a perspective.¹

Most scholars, however, think that Peter uses this label in a metaphorical way to refer to his readers’ spiritual status. An analogy may be seen in the manner in which he treats slavery. Many of the readers were actually slaves, but all Christians become slaves in a metaphorical sense and thus stand to learn from the actual slaves how to bear up under unjust suffering (see 2:18–21). Likewise, some of those who received this letter probably were “resident aliens” in a literal sense, but even those who were not should realize that they have become such as a result of their faith. Thus the pastoral counsel to those who are literally “homeless” in this world applies to all Christians, as all are separated from their true home in heaven.

1. See John H. Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless: A Sociological Exegesis of 1 Peter* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981).

26.15

Honor and Shame in 1 Peter

First Peter tries to help its readers evaluate what is happening to them in light of the enormous weight placed on honor and shame in their culture. They have suffered terrible disgrace and a loss of status in a world that prizes social reputation above all else. Against this background, the author calls the readers to realize that they are actually in a position of much greater honor than they were before.

They have gone

- from living in darkness to living in marvelous light (2:9);
- from being “not a people” to being God’s people (2:10);
- from being ignorant (1:14) to being people who are obedient to the truth (1:22);
- from living in futility (1:18) to living in hope (1:3).

If their neighbors do not recognize this, it is because those neighbors lack the ability to determine what is truly honorable or shameful; they are ignorant and foolish people who do not know God (2:15; 4:3–4).

They are like the people who rejected Christ, the way foolish and incompetent builders would toss aside what they took to be a worthless rock without realizing it was actually the chief cornerstone (2:4–8).

With keen psychological insight, the author of 1 Peter discerns that the abusers are actually motivated by fear, and he urges his readers

not to be afraid of their fear (or, possibly, not to “fear what they fear,” as the NRSV has it; see 3:14).

Furthermore, the author can promise his readers that those who believe in Jesus “will not be put to shame” (2:6); indeed, the current experience of suffering may provide them with an opportunity to attain even greater honor before God when Jesus Christ is revealed (1:7).

See Barth L. Campbell, *Honor, Shame, and the Rhetoric of 1 Peter*, SBLDS 160 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998).

26.16

1 Peter 2:13–17—Church and State: The Ethic of Subordination

Biblical studies on “how the New Testament perceives church-state relationships” identify three distinct stances that are commended in different New Testament writings:

1. the ethic of subordination (found in the letters of Paul and in 1 Peter)
2. the ethic of resistance (found in Johannine writings and, especially, Revelation)
3. the ethic of critical distancing (found in the Synoptic Gospels)

Here we look at the ethic of subordination. For the other two views, see 1.18 and 1.20.

Summary Description of the Ethic of Subordination

The government is understood to be a gift of God, divinely established for the common good. Its God-given purpose is to encourage and maintain what is beneficial for our life together and to discourage what is harmful and disruptive. Or, put another way, the state is God’s instrument in the human community to preserve law and order and to promote justice and peace. Its power consists in its responsibility to exercise its authority toward these beneficial ends. Christians, in turn, owe to the government

their loyalty and respect. Because government is a divine gift they support its preservation of the good and opposition to evil, pray for those in authority, pay taxes, and try to live as model citizens of human communities. In so doing they act in accordance with God's intent. Conversely, to resist the state is to risk both punishment and divine disapproval.¹

Key Texts Expressive of the Ethic of Subordination

Sirach 10:4 (second-century-BCE deuterocanonical/apocryphal writing):

The government of the earth is in the hand of the Lord, and over it he will raise up the right leader for the time.

Romans 13:1–6:

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore, whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval; for it is God's servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore, one must be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience. For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, busy with this very thing. Pay to all what is due them—taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to

whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due.

Titus 3:1–2:

Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show every courtesy to everyone.

1 Peter 2:13–17:

For the Lord's sake accept the authority of every human institution, whether of the emperor as supreme, or of governors, as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing right you should silence the ignorance of the foolish. As servants of God, live as free people, yet do not use your freedom as a pretext for evil. Honor everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

Some Common Observations regarding the Ethic of Subordination

- According to Walter Pilgrim, this position has been the dominant one for Christian history.
- The position may derive in some sense from the fourth (Calvinist fifth) commandment. Note, for example, Martin Luther's explanation of that commandment in this *Small Catechism*:

Honor your father and mother.

Question: What does this mean?

Answer: We are to fear and love God so that we do not despise or anger our parents *and others in authority*, but respect, obey, love, and esteem them.”

- When Paul wrote Romans 13:1–7, he probably thought that the end of the world was near. Would it affect his position if he knew otherwise? Consider:
 1. Titus and 1 Peter are less informed by such eschatological urgency.
 2. Holders of other views also thought the end of the world was near.
 3. Should eschatological urgency be regarded as a first-century mistake or as a characteristic intrinsic to Christian theology?
- The Romans text was probably written around 55 CE, during the reign of Nero (54–68), who would later persecute Christians horribly and have Paul put to death by the sword. However, during the early years of Nero’s rule, conditions in Rome were favorable for Christians.
- The word translated “be subject to” in Romans 13:1 (*hypotassein*) implies some degree of mutuality or reciprocal obligation. It is elsewhere used of wives to husbands. Some have suggested “be subordinate to” as a better translation, the key point being to recognize one’s proper position or role within the social structure.

- It is interesting that the Romans text does not use the word “obey” (*peitharchein*) with regard to governing authorities. That word is used in Titus 3:5 but not with the authorities as its obvious object. The only New Testament text using the word “obey” with explicit reference to governing authorities is Acts 5:29: “Peter and the apostles answered, ‘We must obey God rather than any human authority.’”
- Is Paul’s counsel in Romans specific to some particular situation? Some have suggested that he wanted to discourage Roman Christians from taking part in the sort of revolt against the empire undertaken by Jewish nationalists in the late 60s.
- The claim that God institutes all governing authorities appears to be in tension with views expressed elsewhere in the New Testament. For example, in Luke 4:6 the devil says to Jesus that authority over all the kingdoms of the world “has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please.”
- This counsel regarding submission to governing authorities seems to be based entirely on an assumption of good and just government, which wields the power of the sword to reward good and punish wrong. Does Paul mean to indicate that this is always the case (evident or not) or does he mean to offer counsel that would be appropriate only when that is in fact the case?

1. Walter Pilgrim, *Uneasy Neighbors: Church and State in the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 7.

26.17

Descent into Hell

Two curious passages in 1 Peter have been the subject of much speculation.

1 Peter 3:19–20

First Peter 3:19–20 indicates that Christ was made alive in the spirit after his death and made a proclamation to spirits that had been imprisoned from the days of Noah. Different interpretations have been offered for what this might mean.

Preaching to Deceased Humans

An ancient tradition of the church holds that Jesus descended spiritually into the world of the dead during the interim between his crucifixion and resurrection (cf. Rom. 10:7; Eph. 4:9–10). This tradition is developed in several apocryphal writings and is referenced by one line of the Apostles' Creed, a fourth-century confessional statement that asserts, "He descended into hell" (or, in some versions, "to the dead"). In some traditions, the purpose of this descent is construed as being to deliver righteous persons from the Old Testament period who were waiting on God to be vindicated, but in 1 Peter proclamation to the disobedient is emphasized (3:20). Thus the purpose envisioned here could have been to preach the gospel to condemned sinners from the age of Noah and give them a chance to be saved.

Preaching to Disobedient Angels

A completely different interpretation of the passage suggests that the imprisoned spirits are not deceased persons but rather are disobedient angels. Specifically, they are the “sons of God” who in the days before the flood mated with earth women and produced a race of giants, as reported in Genesis 6:1–4 (a story expanded on in numerous Jewish apocryphal writings, especially 1 Enoch). If this is the case, then 1 Peter may be reporting that Jesus visited the place where these troublesome spirits are imprisoned (whether in heaven or hell—the text does not say) to confirm God’s final victory and triumph over them. The point would be to emphasize Jesus’s power over cosmic forces (cf. 3:22).

The second interpretation is preferred by the great majority of scholars today.

1 Peter 4:6

First Peter 4:6 alludes to the gospel being preached “even to the dead.” Again, two different interpretations have been offered: this could be a reference to the tradition of Jesus visiting the underworld to deliver or evangelize persons from the Old Testament period (as indicated above); or it might simply be a reference to the gospel having been preached to persons who are now dead but who will live again (cf. 1 Thess. 4:13–18).

Whatever interpretations of these two passages are adopted, both testify to what theologians sometimes call the “temporal universality”

of Christ's action: what Jesus did had consequences for the past as well as for the present and the future.

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26.18

1 Peter 1:34–35—All Flesh Is Grass

Christina Rossetti (1830–94) was an English poet who is best remembered today for the narrative poem “Goblin Market” and for the poems “All Flesh Is Grass” and “In the Bleak Midwinter,” both of which are often set to music and performed as sacred songs.

“All Flesh Is Grass” was inspired by 1 Peter 1:24–25, which in turn was a citation from Isaiah 40:6–8. It expresses a central theme of 1 Peter, that of finding one’s true home in a realm beyond earth and death.

“All Flesh is Grass”

So brief a life, and then an endless life
Or endless death;
So brief a life, then endless peace or strife:
Whoso considereth
How man but like a flower
Or shoot of grass
Blooms an hour,
Well may sigh “Alas!”

1 Peter 1:24–25:

“All flesh is like grass
and all its glory like the flower of grass.
The grass withers,
and the flower falls,

but the word of the Lord endures forever.”

Isaiah 40:6–8:

A voice says, “Cry out.”

And I said, “What shall I cry?”

All people are like grass,

their constancy is like the flower of the field.

The grass withers and the flower fades,

when the breath of the LORD blows upon it.

surely the people are grass.

The grass withers, the flower fades,

but the word of our God will stand forever.

26.19

1 Peter 3:18–20 and 4:6—Harrowing of Hell

First Peter contains two passages that seem to suggest Jesus traveled to the realm of the dead in order to preach to “spirits in prison” and possibly rescue souls from hell.

For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. (1 Pet. 3:18–20)

For this is the reason the gospel was proclaimed even to the dead, so that, though they had been judged in the flesh as everyone is judged, they might live in the spirit as God does. (1 Pet. 4:6)

The same concept might also be referenced in this passage from Ephesians:

It is said, “When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people.” (When it says, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.) (Eph. 4:8–10)

These passages would be the origin of a doctrine that is often called “the harrowing of hell.” It receives a nod in one line of the Apostles’ Creed, developed in the fourth century, and was also the inspiration for a fourth-century poem by Prudentius.

The Apostles’ Creed

The Apostles’ Creed is a ritual confession of faith used in the liturgies of many churches. Its origins are somewhat obscure: its earliest presentation is in a letter from Ambrose around 390, but that letter mentions it as something already ancient, which the church has “always kept and preserved undefiled.”

The most commonly accepted version of the Apostles’ Creed in use today states:

I believe in Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day, he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and will come to judge the living and the dead.

Other translations and versions do exist. The line “he descended to the dead” is sometimes rendered “he descended into hell,” especially in versions used by more traditionally minded Roman Catholic

churches. The choice of wording (“to the dead” or “into hell”) is a question of how to translate the Latin phrase *descendit ad inferna*. Most scholars agree that the word *inferna* refers somewhat generically to the place where spirits of departed persons dwell, a place that sometimes but not always is assumed to be a realm of eternal punishment. Thus either translation is justifiable, though there has been a clear preference for “the dead” in recent years.

It is also noteworthy that the phrase is sometimes missing altogether in ancient manuscripts of the creed. The line does appear in the first known rendition mentioned above (ca. 390), but after that it appears to have vanished from the creed until 650. By 800, however, the manuscript tradition had stabilized and the reference to Christ’s descent (either to the dead or into hell) had become a standard part of Christian confession.

Hymn by Prudentius (348–ca. 405)

Prudentius was a Roman Christian poet who lived in Spain and wrote numerous hymns based on biblical or theological themes. His meditation on the birth of Christ, “Of the Father’s Love Begotten,” remains a popular Christmas hymn in many churches to this day.

He also wrote the following hymn, reflecting his understanding of the harrowing of hell, which occurred while Jesus’s physical body was still on the cross or in the tomb (while there was darkness over the face of the earth)

Yea, that they might know salvation who in Hades' prison were
pent,

In His mercy condescending through Hell's gloomy gates He
went;

Bolt and massy hinge were shattered, adamantine portals rent.

For the door that all receiveth, but releaseth nevermore,
Opens now and, slowly turning, doth the ghosts to light restore,
Who, the eternal laws suspended, tread again its dusky floor.

But, while God with golden glory floods the murky realms of
night,

And upon the startled shadows dawns a day serene and bright,
In the darkened vault of heaven stars forlorn refuse their light.

For the sun in garb of mourning veiled his radiant orb and
passed

From his flaming path in sorrow, hiding till mankind aghast
Deemed that o'er a world of chaos Night's eternal pall was cast.

Excerpt from *Hymn 9*¹

1. Aurelius Prudentius, *The Hymns of Prudentius*, trans. R. Martin Pope (London: J. M. Dent and Co. Aldine House, 1905).

26.20

1 Peter 5:8—“Seeking Whom He May Devour”

Fred Vargas is the pseudonym used by the French archaeological-turned-novelist Frédérique Audoin-Rouzeau (1957–). She has written a series of highly successful and critically acclaimed crime novels, all published in the twenty-first century.

Her second book in the series, *Seeking Whom He May Devour*, takes its name from 1 Peter 5:8: “Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour.” In the novel, the voracious adversary is not the devil per se but a group of werewolves, the supposed existence of which the series protagonist Commissaire Adamsberg must investigate in a remote French village.

Actually, the biblical reference is found only in the title of the English translation of the book. The original French title was *L’Homme à l’envers* (“The Inside-out Man”), since werewolves can disguise themselves in human form only by turning their wolfskin inside out. Since that werewolf fact is not well known to English readers, the publishers thought a different (and more devilish) title would be better.

27.0

2 Peter: Outline of Contents

- I. Letter opening (1:1–2)
- II. Patron’s benefaction and client’s response (1:3–11)
- III. Fictive occasion of the letter (1:12–15)
- IV. First apology: defense of prophecy (1:16–21)
- V. Second apology: defense of divine judgment (2:1–10a)
- VI. Shame on the opponents (2:10b–22)
- VII. Third apology: defense of the end of the world (3:1–7)
- VIII. Fourth apology: defense of “delay” as gift (3:8–10)
- IX. Moral consequences of this doctrine (3:11–14)
- X. Even Paul agrees (3:15–16)
- XI. Letter conclusion (3:17–18)

Courtesy of *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, ed. Mark Allan Powell (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 786.

27.1

2 Peter in the Revised Common Lectionary

Text	Series	Liturgical Occasion	Calendar Date
1:16–21	A	Transfiguration	7 Sundays before Easter
3:8–15a	B	Advent 2	3 Sundays before Dec 25

27.2

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27.3

Parallels between Jude and 2 Peter (Box 27.1)

Jude		2 Peter	
v. 4	stole into the community	2:1	bring in opinions secretly
v. 4	“long ago . . . designated for condemnation”	2:3	condemnation pronounced long ago
v. 4	pervert the grace of God	2:2	way of truth is maligned
v. 4	licentiousness	2:2	licentious ways
v. 4	deny our Master	2:1	even deny the Master
v. 6	angels kept “in chains in deepest darkness for the judgment”	2:4	angels kept “in chains in deepest darkness until the judgment”
v. 7	Sodom and Gomorrah serve as an example	2:6	Sodom and Gomorrah made an example
v. 7	unnatural lust	2:10	depraved lust
v. 8	“defile the flesh, reject authority, and slander the glorious ones”	2:10	“indulge their flesh . . . despise authority . . . and slander the glorious ones”
v. 9	archangel did not bring a condemnation of slander	2:11	angels do not bring a slanderous judgment
v. 10	slander what they do not understand	2:12	slander what they do not understand
v. 10	like irrational animals, live by instinct, and are destroyed	2:12	like irrational animals, creatures of instinct, will be destroyed
v. 11	“Woe to them!”	2:14	“Accursed children!”
v. 11	“abandon themselves to Balaam’s error”	2:15	follow the way of Balaam
v. 11	error for the sake of gain	2:15	wages of doing wrong
v. 12	“blemishes on your love-feasts”	2:13	blemishes (at your feasts)
v. 12	feast with you without fear	2:13	revel while they feast with you
v. 12	waterless clouds	2:17	waterless springs
v. 12	“clouds carried along by the winds”	2:17	mists driven by a storm
v. 13	deepest darkness reserved for them	2:17	deepest darkness reserved for them
v. 16	bombastic, flatter people	2:18	bombastic, entice people
v. 17	remember predictions of apostles	3:2	remember commandments spoken through apostles
v. 18	in the last time, scoffers will come, indulging their own lusts	3:3	“in the last days scoffers will come . . . indulging their own lusts”

27.4

Godliness and Knowledge in 2 Peter

Second Peter calls on readers to grow in godliness and proposes that they might do this through knowledge of God (1:3). Specifically, the letter stresses knowledge of the future and knowledge of the past.

Knowing the future: Unlike the false teachers, who take no account of God's impending judgment (3:3–4), the readers know the truth about Christ's certain and imminent return (3:8–10). For them, the question becomes "What sort of persons should we be?" (cf. 3:11). The obvious answer is: persons who lead "lives of holiness and godliness," persons who strive to be found "at peace, without spot or blemish" when that moment arrives (3:11, 14).

Remembering the past: Unlike the false teachers, who ignore the record of God's past judgments (2:4–10; 3:5–6), the readers must not be "short-sighted and blind" with regard to the past (1:9). Further, they should be appreciative of what God has done for them, remembering the "cleansing of past sins" (1:9) if they wish to confirm their call and election by God and move forward in righteousness (1:10).

Taken together, these points emphasize both the prospect for growth (1:4) and the danger of backsliding (2:20–21).

27.5

Judgment Day in the Bible

The concept of “judgment day” is found primarily in the New Testament, where there is reference to a time when God or the Messiah (or the Son of Man) will punish the wicked and redeem the righteous. References to the final day of judgment can also be found in earlier writings.

Old Testament

The background for this concept may be found in the Hebrew Bible, where God is regarded as the Judge of all the earth (Gen. 18:25; Ps. 9:7–8). God’s judgment is often invoked on individuals (Gen. 16:5) or nations (Judg. 11:27). Psalm writers looked for God to reward the righteous, whether individuals (Ps. 1:5–6), nations (Ps. 110:6), the needy and oppressed (Pss. 72:2–4; 103:6), or the whole world (Ps. 96:13). Many prophets also spoke of the “day of the Lord,” when God would punish nations for their wickedness (e.g., Obad. 15). Such judgment would also come upon Israel (Amos 5:18–20), Judah (Joel 1:15), and all the inhabitants of the earth (Zeph. 1:14–18). Elsewhere, Joel 2:30–32 and Malachi 4:5–6 suggest that those who repent beforehand may be spared. Specific expressions that might be taken as implying a judgment day include “on that day” (Isa. 24:21), “the days are surely coming” (Jer. 9:25; cf. Amos 4:2), or simply “then” (Mal. 3:5). Notably, these and similar phrases

sometimes point to a time of redemption: “on that day” (Amos 9:11), “in those days” (Jer. 33:16), and, again, “the days are surely coming” (Jer. 23:7–8; cf. Amos 9:13).

Generally speaking, the Hebrew Bible points to God’s judgment as occurring within history. Only a few passages hint that the righteous might hope for redemption beyond this life or this world (Job 19:25–27; Isa. 26:19; Ezek. 37:1–14). Daniel 12:1–3 promises that many who have died will awake, some to everlasting life, some to everlasting contempt. Isaiah 66:24 contemplates the eternal torment of the wicked.

Apocrypha/Deuterocanonical Literature

The notion of both punishment and redemption extending beyond human history or life in this world is developed more fully in some Greek texts from the Second Temple period (Jdt. 16:17; Wis. 3:1–9; 2 Esd. 14:34–35). It is in those writings that the actual term “day of judgment” first appears (Jdt. 16:17; Wis. 3:18; 2 Esd. 7:38, 102, 104, 113; 12:34). The emerging idea is that people will be judged individually in the new age—or perhaps after death—and consigned to their respective destinies. This concept of the “day of judgment” has many affinities with what is found in the New Testament.

New Testament Gospels

According to the first three Gospels, Jesus spoke frequently of the coming judgment. The term “day of judgment” appears in Matthew

10:15; 11:22, 24; 12:36. Often, reference is simply to “the judgment” (Matt. 12:41–42; Luke 10:14). Related expressions include “that day” (Luke 21:34–35), “on that day” (Matt. 7:22; Luke 17:31), and “in those days” (Mark 13:17, 19, 24). Sometimes these terms also refer to the expected time of tribulation.

Many of Jesus’s parables (Matt. 18:23–35) and other sayings (Mark 10:17–25) call his hearers to repentance so that they might, at the judgment, be found fit to enter the kingdom of God. The classic passage is Matthew 25:31–46, where the Son of Man or “king” sits in judgment, judging the nations of the world as a shepherd separates sheep from goats.

According to Matthew 19:28, the twelve disciples of Jesus are to join in judging Israel. In John’s Gospel, Jesus speaks of a future judgment (5:28–29; 12:48), but more often emphasizes his own authority as judge (5:22, 30) and suggests that judgment is already taking place (9:39; 12:31).

Other New Testament Writings

The term “day of judgment” also appears in 2 Peter 2:9; 3:7; and 1 John 4:17. That God will judge the world on a certain future day, often designated as “that day” or the “day of the Lord,” is also stated (Acts 17:31; Rom. 2:16; 1 Thess. 5:2–4; 2 Thess. 2:2; 2 Tim. 1:18; 4:1–8; 2 Pet. 3:10–12; Jude 6). Paul alternatively refers to the coming “day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 1:8), “the day of the Lord Jesus” (2 Cor. 1:14), “the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6), “the

day of Christ” (Phil. 1:10; 2:16), and, on occasion, “the day of wrath” (Rom. 2:5). Revelation 14:7 looks for the “hour” of God’s judgment.

In some of these passages, God is the expected judge; in others, it is Christ. Paul thought that “the saints” (faithful Christians) would also judge the world (1 Cor. 6:2; cf. Matt. 19:28). Only those who lived rightly could hope for a favorable decision at the judgment (Rom. 2:1–8; 2 Cor. 5:6–10; cf. Gal. 5:16–21; see also Rev. 20:12–13). Exactly how Paul’s ideas about the coming judgment are to be reconciled with his doctrine of “justification through faith” (e.g., Gal. 2:15–16; 3:1–14; Rom. 3:21–4:25) is not completely clear (but cf. 1 Cor. 3:10–15).

When?

Many New Testament traditions urge that the time of judgment, along with the coming of the kingdom of God (or the Son of Man), is so near that it may happen at any time (e.g., 1 Thess. 5:1–3; James 5:8–9; 1 Pet. 4:5, 7, 17). Paul had to oppose certain enthusiasts who thought the day of the Lord was already present (2 Thess. 2:1–12; cf. 1 Cor. 4:5). A few New Testament passages hint that judgment takes place directly after death (Luke 16:1–9, 19–31; Heb. 9:27; cf. 2 Esd. 14:34–35).

27.6

2 Peter in the Christian Canon

No other book in the New Testament had more trouble than 2 Peter in gaining admittance to the Christian canon of Scripture.

- The Muratorian Canon (ca. 170–210) does not list it as part of the Christian Scriptures.
- Origen of Alexandria (ca. 215–250) says, that “Peter left behind one letter that is acknowledged, and possibly a second, but it is disputed.”
- Eusebius of Caesarea, around 311, lists 2 Peter among “disputed books which are nonetheless known by many.”
- Didymus the Blind (who died in 398) urged people not to “overlook that the epistle is forged,” insisting that “though it is read publicly, it is nevertheless not in the canon.”
- Athanasius of Alexandria, in 367, accepted 2 Peter without question in a list of canonical books that was later ratified by an important regional council of churches (the Third Synod of Carthage) in 393.

27.7

Barren Fig-Tree: Excerpt from a Sermon by John Bunyan (Box 27.4)

John Bunyan (author of *Pilgrim's Progress*) preached a sermon in 1673 on Luke 13:6–9, stressing the limits of God's forbearance—a prominent theme in 2 Peter.

Barren Fig-tree, Dost thou hear?
the Ax is laid to thy roots,
the Lord Jesus prays God to spare thee;
Hath he been digging about thee?
Hath he been dunging of thee?
O Barren Fig-tree, Now thou art come to the point;
if thou shalt now become good,
if thou shalt after a gracious manner suck in the Gospel-dung,
and if thou shalt bring forth fruit unto God . . . Well!
But if not, the fire is the last.
Fruit or the Fire!
Fruit or the Fire, Barren Fig-tree!

27.8

Authorship of 2 Peter

Second Peter leaves no doubt that it is to be read as correspondence from the apostle Peter (see 1:1, 17–18).

Nevertheless, it is considered to be pseudepigraphical by almost all New Testament scholars, including many who are reluctant to grant the pseudepigraphy of other New Testament writings.

Majority View: Author is Unknown

The letter that we know as 2 Peter actually refers to 1 Peter as an earlier correspondence (2 Pet. 3:1). Accordingly, scholars who believe that 1 Peter is pseudepigraphical, written after Peter's death, will logically conclude that 2 Peter too must be pseudepigraphical, written later than 1 Peter and therefore also after Peter's death. But what if 1 Peter is not pseudepigraphical? Then the problem is that 1 Peter and 2 Peter are so different from each other that most interpreters conclude that they could not have been written by the same person (thus if 1 Peter is not pseudepigraphical, 2 Peter must be). The differences are not just matters of language and style (which might be explained by the employment of two different scribes) but also extend to theology and overall tone. For example, 1 Peter urges not returning abuse for abuse and being open to outsiders (3:9), whereas 2 Peter relies on polemic and innuendo to vilify opponents (e.g., 2:12–22).

The author of 2 Peter usually is assumed to have had a copy of the Letter of Jude, and many scholars think that Jude was written sometime after Peter's death. Even if Jude was written a few years before Peter's martyrdom, it seems unlikely that Peter would have obtained a copy of that letter so soon after it was written. Also, the letter appears to be written from a very Hellenistic viewpoint that does not fit well with what we would expect of Peter, the Galilean fisherman who was prominent in the Jerusalem church and became known as an apostle to Jews (Gal. 2:7–8). For example, 2 Peter describes salvation as becoming "participants of the divine nature" (1:4), and the letter refers to rebellious angels being imprisoned in "Tartarus" (most English translations: "hell"), the realm of the underworld in Greek mythology (2:4).

The letter refers to a skepticism that has arisen among Christians who note that the promise of Christ's coming has not been fulfilled (3:4). Most scholars think that this sort of problem would have arisen after the deaths of Jesus's followers (including Peter). Furthermore, the author responds to this skepticism by indicating that the parousia could still be thousands of years away (3:8). Scholars do not think it likely that Peter or anyone else in the first generation of believers would have developed such a nuanced stance toward the second coming; other evidence indicates that the first Christians expected Jesus to return very soon (1 Cor. 7:26, 29–31; 1 Thess. 4:13–17; Heb. 10:37; James 5:8; 1 Pet. 4:7; cf. Mark 13:30).

The letter speaks of apostolic tradition as a norm to be defended: the readers are told to remain “established in the truth that has come to you” (1:12) and to remember “the commandments of the Lord and Savior spoken through your apostles” (3:2). Some interpreters take these references as implying a virtual equation of “what is true” with “what is apostolic,” a notion of authority that did not take hold in the church until the second century. Furthermore, the author refers to these apostles as though they are a group to which he does not himself belong. If the apostle Peter were actually writing this letter, wouldn’t he tell them to remember “the commandments of the Lord and Savior spoken through *us*”?

The letter makes an explicit reference to the deaths of “our ancestors” (3:4), which most scholars take to mean “the apostles” or “the first generation of Christians.” If it does mean that, then 2 Peter almost certainly would be pseudepigraphical, written after the death of Peter (one of the ancestors). It is possible, however, that the word “ancestors” is used here to mean “all those who have gone before us” or refers to Jewish ancestors from biblical history.

In 2 Peter 3:15–16, Paul’s letters are referred to as a group of writings that are being studied and interpreted in divergent ways within the church. Furthermore, the author of 2 Peter regards those letters as Scripture and assumes that his readers think of them as Scripture also. But scholars do not believe that the letters of Paul were copied or collected in a way that would allow them to have

received this sort of attention during the lifetime of Peter (i.e., during the lifetime of Paul himself, who was martyred at the same time as Peter, ca. 64–65). Furthermore, scholars do not think that Paul's letters were regarded as Scripture until many years after the passing of Peter and Paul.

The letter shifts back and forth between use of the future tense, when it presents Peter predicting things that will happen after his death (2:1–3; 3:1–4), and the present tense, when it addresses its readers as though those predictions are now coming true (2:10–22; 3:5–7). The strong impression is that the letter is intended for Christians who live a generation or so after Peter's death (during the time when the predictions are coming true). Most interpreters think it more likely that a pseudonymous author wrote a letter to address those believers "in Peter's name," rather than that Peter himself wrote such a letter proleptically.

The letter had considerable trouble gaining recognition and acceptance within the church, something that would not have happened if there had been confidence that it actually had been written by Peter. Indeed, 2 Peter is never even mentioned in church writings until the third century, and then it is alluded to only in a writing from the Eastern church (by Origen of Alexandria) that questions its legitimacy. It is not mentioned in the Western church until the fourth century, and then again, it comes up only as a "disputed" writing.

If 2 Peter is not pseudepigraphical, we certainly would want to know how a letter written in Rome by Peter during his last days (1:14–15) could be either ignored or rejected by Christians in that city for more than three hundred years. This question becomes even more pointed when we realize that the contents of the letter would have served the interests of the Roman church well (which could explain why the letter eventually was accepted).

This letter appears to have been regarded with suspicion and used with caution for one reason only: it was widely regarded as pseudepigraphical. The only writings by Christians that appear to have drawn on 2 Peter in these first few centuries are two apocryphal writings, the *Apocalypse of Peter* (ca. 110–140) and the *Acts of Peter* (ca. 180), both of which also claim to have been written by the apostle.

Finally, 2 Peter is usually thought to belong to the literary genre of “testament,” and all testaments were, by definition, pseudepigraphical. A testament is a work that presents a fictive “deathbed speech” of some famous person from the past, addressing issues of the day. The idea is to apply the perspective and insights of the past individual to current events; ancient readers who understood this genre of literature did not imagine that the work offered the literal words of the historical individual (as though some long-lost writing by that person had just been discovered). In 2 Peter

we find all the standard literary conventions of a testament, with the exception that it is cast in the form of a letter.

Minority View: Supporters of Authenticity

A few scholars dispute the accuracy or significance of the points listed above, insisting that a case can be made for regarding 2 Peter as having been written by the apostle Peter.

- D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, “2 Peter,” in *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 654–68, esp. 661–63.
- Donald Guthrie, “The Second Epistle of Peter,” in *New Testament Introduction*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 805–57, esp. 820–42.
- Michael Green, *2 Peter Reconsidered* (London: Tyndale, 1961).
- Bo Reicke, *The Epistles of James, Peter, and Jude*, AB 37 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964).

27.9

Did Peter Write 2 Peter? (Box 27.2)

Most scholars believe the letter called “2 Peter” was written pseudepigraphically some years after the death of the apostle Peter.

Here are a few reasons why:

- It does not appear to be written by the same person who wrote 1 Peter.
- It exhibits a reliance on Jude, which they think was written after (or close to) the time of Peter’s death.
- It is written from a strongly Hellenistic perspective inconsistent with what might be attributed to a person of Palestinian Jewish background.
- It regards the second coming of Christ as something that might not occur for thousands of years (3:8).
- It looks back on the time of the apostles as a sacred bygone era (3:2, 4).
- It refers to Paul’s letters as a collection of writings that are being interpreted as Scripture (3:15–16).
- It seeks to address the concerns of Christians a generation or more after Peter’s death.

These points are disputed by scholars who think that Peter did write the letter.

27.10

2 Peter as a Testament (Box 27.3)

The New Testament letter known as 2 Peter contains the four key elements of a Jewish testament:

- A heroic person offers a précis of his teaching or ideas (1:3–11).
- The hero announces that his death is near (1:14).
- The hero urges readers of the testament to remember his message after he is gone (1:12–13, 15).
- The hero predicts what will happen after his death, describing circumstances that have become reality for readers of the testament, and offers advice for how his ideas will apply in those circumstances (2:1–3; 3:1–4).

27.11

Who Were the False Teachers in 2 Peter?

Scholars have struggled to connect the false teachers in 2 Peter with some identifiable group known to us from history.

Two suggestions have been offered.

Christians Influenced by Gnosticism

Gnostics used creative mythologies to promote their ideas (cf. 1:16) and also were known for collecting the letters of Paul and interpreting them in ways that supported their way of thinking (cf. 3:15–16). Some gnostics were given to moral libertinism, based on a spiritualized notion of resurrection that defined salvation as a present experience that could have rendered the need for a parousia or final judgment obsolete. And gnostics rejected the role of God as creator of the earth, a point that is also emphatically proclaimed in this letter (3:5).

Christians Influenced by Epicureanism

Epicureans rejected divine intervention into human affairs, claiming that the continuity of history revealed there was no need to appease the gods or fear their wrath (cf. 3:4). And even though the philosophy was intended to inspire wise and responsible choices, it sometimes had the opposite effect, causing some Epicureans to become crass

pleasure seekers who celebrated what was supposed to be freedom from anxiety as a total freedom from accountability instead (cf. 2:19).

28.0

1 John: Outline of Contents

- I. Prologue: the grounds of the testimony (1:1–4)
- II. The true message of Jesus (1:5–3:24)
 - A. Fellowship, obedience, and forgiveness (1:5–2:17)
 - B. Warnings against false teachings (2:18–28)
 - C. The marks of life in the community (3:1–24)
- III. Testing the claims of those who testify (4:1–5:12)
 - A. Testing the spirits (4:1–6)
 - B. Love as the essential test (4:7–21)
 - C. Obedience to the commandments (5:1–5)
 - D. The true testimony (5:6–12)
- IV. Postscript: sins, forgiveness, and certain knowledge (5:13–21)

Courtesy of *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, ed. Mark Allan Powell (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 483.

28.1

2 John: Outline of Contents

I. Salutation (1–3)

II. The love commandment (4–6)

III. Warning not to receive false teachers (7–11)

IV. Conclusion (12–13)

28.2

3 John: Outline of Contents

- I. Salutation (1–4)
- II. Commendation for showing hospitality to emissaries (5–8)
- III. Condemnation of Diotrephes (8–11)
- IV. Recommendation of Demetrius (12)
- V. Conclusion (13–15)

28.3

1 John in the Revised Common Lectionary

Text	Series	Liturgical Occasion	Calendar Date
1 John 1:1–2:2	B	Easter 2	1 Sunday after Easter
1 John 3:1–3	A	All Saints' Day	Nov. 1
1 John 3:1–7	B	Easter 3	2 Sundays after Easter
1 John 3:16–24	B	Easter 4	3 Sundays after Easter
1 John 4:7–21	B	Easter 5	4 Sundays after Easter
1 John 5:1–6	B	Easter 6	5 Sundays after Easter
1 John 5:9–13	B	Easter 7	6 Sundays after Easter

Note: 2 John and 3 John are not used in the lectionary (for Sundays or major festivals).

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28.5

Similarities between the Johannine Letters and the Gospel of John (Box 28.2)

- light and darkness (1 John 1:5–7; 2:9–11; cf. John 8:12; 12:46)
- unity of Father and Son (1 John 1:3; 2:22–24; 2 John 9; cf. John 5:20; 10:30, 38; 14:10)
- references to “the truth” (1 John 2:21; 3:19; 2 John 1; 3 John 3, 8; cf. John 8:32; 18:37)
- use of *paraklētos*, “Paraclete” (1 John 2:1; John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7)
- being hated by the world (1 John 3:13; cf. John 15:18–19; 17:13–16)
- God sending Christ into the world out of love (1 John 4:9; cf. John 3:16)
- Jesus coming in the flesh (1 John 4:2; 2 John 7; cf. John 1:14)
- Christ laying down his life for others (1 John 3:16; cf. John 10:11, 15, 17–18; 15:12–13)
- being born of God (1 John 2:29; 3:9; cf. John 1:13; 3:3–8)
- knowing God (1 John 2:3–5, 13–14; 3:1, 6; 4:6–8; cf. John 1:10; 8:55; 14:7; 16:3)

- abiding in God/Christ (1 John 2:6, 27–28; 3:6, 24; 4:13–16; cf. John 6:56; 15:4–10)
- new and old commandments (1 John 2:7; 2 John 5; cf. John 13:34)
- loving one another (1 John 4:11–12; 3:11, 23; 2 John 5; cf. John 13:34; 15:12)
- water and blood (1 John 5:6–8; cf. John 19:34–35)
- that joy may be complete (1 John 1:4; 2 John 12; cf. John 15:11; 16:24; 17:13)

28.6

Affirmation in 1 John (Box 28.5)

The author of 1 John affirms his readers, assuring them that they are doing well and that they enjoy a positive status before God.

- They have had the word of life revealed to them (1:1–2).
- They have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ (2:1).
- They have assimilated the truth of the new commandment (2:8).
- They have received forgiveness of sins (2:12).
- They know the Father, the one who is from the beginning (2:13–14).
- They have overcome the evil one (2:13–14).
- They are strong, and the word of God abides in them (2:14).
- They have been anointed by the Holy One and know the truth (2:20–21).
- They do not need anyone to teach them (2:27).
- They are children of God already, and they will be like Christ (3:1–2; 5:19).
- They have Christ abiding in them, and he has given them the Spirit (3:24; 4:13).
- They are from God and have conquered spirits of the antichrist (4:3–4, 6).

- They are indwelt by one who is greater than the one who is in the world (4:4).
- They have experienced love being perfected among them (4:17).
- They have faith that conquers the world (5:4).
- They believe in the name of the Son of God (5:13).
- They have eternal life (5:13).
- They have boldness before God in prayer (5:14–15).
- They have been given understanding to know God (5:20).
- They are in the God who is true, through his Son, Jesus Christ (5:20).

28.7

Dualism in 1 John (Box 28.4)

The fabric of 1 John is imbued with language depicting sharply opposed alternatives; it is always a case of either/or, not both/and.

- light or darkness (1:5–7; 2:8–9)
- truth or falsehood (1:6; 2:4, 21, 27; 4:6)
- church or world (2:15; 3:1, 13; 4:3–5; 5:19)
- life or death (3:14)
- love or hate (4:20)
- children of God or children of the devil (3:8–10)

Ne'er the twain shall meet!

28.8

Analogous Heresies to the Problem in the Johannine Letters

Although we don't know for sure what the secessionists opposed in the Johannine Letters taught, we are aware of certain movements in early Christianity that may have espoused similar ideas.

Docetists: The docetists taught that Christ was a divine being who only seemed to be human (his humanity was an illusion or a disguise). He appeared to suffer but, being divine, could not really suffer or die. Ignatius of Antioch (ca. 110) writes about the docetists, indicating that they were active in Asia Minor in the early second century.

Gnostics: Christian gnostics claimed that Christ brought spiritual knowledge that would provide salvation from an evil material world. They rejected the notion of anything good being associated with "flesh." Some gnostic writings present the claim that those who are spiritually purified live without sin, regardless of obedience to any external moral code (cf. 1 John 1:8–2:2).

Cerinthians: The followers of a particular teacher named Cerinthus believed that "Jesus" and "the Christ" were two different entities, the one a human figure and the other a divine power. The Christ descended on Jesus at his baptism, and for a time Jesus exhibited the hallmarks of divinity (speaking divine secrets and working

miracles). But the Christ departed from Jesus prior to his crucifixion, such that Jesus's death was merely that of a mortal man, without saving power. We know about Cerinthus from the writings of Irenaeus (ca. 180) and others.

28.9

1 John 1:8 in Light of the “Confession of No Sin” in Gnostic Literature

The crisis or schism that prompted the Johannine Letters is often thought to have involved a controversy similar to what churches in succeeding centuries would face with regard to gnosticism.

The author of 1 John insists, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us” (1:8). It is interesting, then, to note that a gnostic document from the third century CE contains a litany in which a variety of errors are listed and respondents confess that they are innocent of these and have not sinned. Some of the specifics regarding the errors or offenses are obscure, but the litany appears to turn a traditional “Confession of Sin” used in many Christian liturgies on its head, transforming it into a “Confession of No Sin (or of Righteousness).”

Note that the anti-Jewish character typical of gnosticism is also evident here.

Leader: For Adam was a laughingstock, since he was made a counterfeit type of man by the Hebdomad, as if he had become stronger than I and my brothers.

Congregation: We are innocent with respect to him, since we have not sinned.

Leader: And Abraham and Isaac and Jacob were a laughingstock, since they, the counterfeit fathers, were given a name by the Hebdomad, as if he had become stronger than I and my brothers.

Congregation: We are innocent with respect to him, since we have not sinned.

Leader: David was a laughingstock in that his son was named the Son of Man, having been influenced by the Hebdomad, as if he had become stronger than I and the fellow members of my race.

Congregation: But we are innocent with respect to him; we have not sinned.¹

1. *Second Treatise of the Great Seth* (Nag Hammadi codices VII.62.27–63.26).

28.10

The Johannine Letters in the Christian Canon

Acceptance of the Johannine Letters as Scripture came in stages:

1 John met with universal, early acceptance; 2 John and 3 John came later.

- The Muratorian Canon (ca. 170–210) says that two letters by John are accepted; most scholars think that this means 1 John and 2 John, but it could mean 1 John and 3 John.
- Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–215) mentions 1 John and 2 John, but not 3 John.
- Origen of Alexandria (ca. 215–250) says that the apostle John “left behind one epistle . . . and possibly a second and a third, but not everyone agrees that these are genuine”; the disputed works clearly are 2 John and 3 John, because Origen notes that “taken together, they do not contain a hundred lines.”
- Eusebius of Caesarea (ca. 311) places “the epistle bearing the name of John” on his list of “acknowledged books”; he then offers a second list of “disputed books,” and on this list he places “those works called the second and third epistles of John.” The question regarding the latter two books concerns “whether they came from the evangelist or from someone with the same name.”
- Athanasius of Alexandria (367) says that “the three letters of John” are to be considered unequivocally among “the books of the New

Testament.” This was also the judgment of the Council of Hippo (393) and the Council of Carthage (397).

- The Syrian church was more cautious in its acceptance of 2 John and 3 John; they were not added to the New Testament in that part of the church until 508.

Note that in the modern church, 2 John and 3 John (like the Letter of Jude) are not used in the lectionary; thus for many Christian denominations, they are never read publicly in church.

28.11

Authorship of the Johannine Letters

None of the three books known as the Johannine Letters in our New Testament identifies its author by name. First John is completely anonymous, and 2 John and 3 John are written by someone who calls himself “the elder.”

How the Books Came to Be Ascribed to John the Apostle

The early church came to ascribe these three writings to the apostle John, a disciple of Jesus, through the following process of reasoning:

- Christians noticed that the language, style, and outlook of the book that is now called “1 John” is remarkably similar to that of the book that we identify as the Gospel of John. They decided that both books must have the same author.
- The book that we now call the “Gospel of John” is also anonymous, but it indicates that some of its material was put into writing by “the beloved disciple” (John 21:24). Many interpreters in the early church thought that this “beloved disciple” must be the apostle John because he is the only prominent member of Jesus’s twelve disciples who is not otherwise mentioned in that book (except for 21:2).

Thus it was said that the apostle John wrote that Gospel (a bit of an exaggeration, since this Gospel claims only that he

wrote certain things down, not that he wrote the whole book), and that the apostle John also wrote 1 John, because it is so similar to the Gospel that the two books must have the same author.

- Many interpreters noted that the language, style, and outlook of 2 John and 3 John are also very similar to that of 1 John (and the Gospel of John). Thus they began saying that those two writings must also be works of the apostle John, though this was affirmed with considerably less confidence.

By the end of the fourth century (e.g., in the writings of Athanasius, ca. 367) it was commonly held that four books of the New Testament had been written by the apostle John, who, for some reason, didn't like to use his name: he called himself "the beloved disciple" in one book, "the elder" in two others, and left a fourth one completely anonymous.

Modern Support for This Traditional View

A few modern scholars maintain that the construal outlined above holds up to scrutiny: the early church (at least by the time of Athanasius) got the authorship of the Johannine writings almost exactly correct.¹

Caveats to the Traditional View

Most scholars would want to amend the traditional view in light of a few observations that have been made regarding these writings over the years:

Almost all modern scholars think that the Gospel of John was produced in stages; the apostle John (the “beloved disciple”) may have started the process, but others continued it after he was gone. Thus similarities between the Gospel and the letters do not necessarily mean that the apostle John wrote the letters; the letters might have been written by one of the authors or editors associated with the Gospel at a later stage. This seems much more likely to most modern scholars.

According to the church historian Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.4), in the second century Papias claimed that there were two prominent leaders named John in the church that produced our Fourth Gospel: John the apostle (the disciple of Jesus) and John the elder (a disciple of the apostle). Thus many interpreters have speculated that John the elder wrote 2 John and 3 John (which are by someone who calls himself “the elder”). And if all of these works have the same author, wouldn’t that mean that John the elder wrote 1 John and part of the Gospel as well?

A number of scholars have noted minor differences between the writings and have questioned whether they actually do have the same author: the Gospel says that Jesus is the light (John 1:4–9; 8:12; 9:5; 12:46) and calls the Holy Spirit a “Paraclete” (14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7), whereas 1 John says that God is light (1:5) and calls Jesus the “Paraclete” (2:1); the Gospel uses words such as “glory” and “glorify,” which are never found in the letters, and 1 John uses

words such as “seed” and “anointing,” which are never found in the Gospel. The Gospel rarely mentions the parousia, which figures prominently in 1 John (see 2:28; 3:1–3; 4:17).

Conclusion

The dominant view today is:

- The three letters probably have a common author (though this is not certain).
- Their author was a leader in the community where the Gospel of John was produced.
- Their author probably was one of the people responsible for writing, editing, or refining the Gospel of John (perhaps the person called “John the elder” by Papias).
- The three letters probably were written at about the same time and probably after the Gospel of John (or at least at a time when that Gospel was in its penultimate form).

1. Proponents of this view include D. A. Carson, *The Johannine Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, forthcoming); I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978).

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28.12

Three Persons Named John?

Many scholars identify three individuals named John in early Christianity, all of whom are associated with different New Testament writings.

John the apostle (the son of Zebedee): He and his brother James were called to be among Jesus's first disciples (Mark 1:19–20). He ministered alongside Peter (Acts 3–4) and came to be known as a pillar of the church (Gal. 2:9). Some people believe he may be “the disciple whom Jesus loved,” whose testimony is incorporated into the Gospel of John (John 21:24).

John the elder (author of the three epistles?): We hear of this person in writings from the early church, including Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History*. He is said to have belonged to the same community as John the apostle and to have been the apostle's disciple (such that the two were often confused by later generations). He is probably the “elder” responsible for at least two of the Johannine epistles (2 John 1:1; 3 John 1:1). Most scholars think he also wrote the first of those letters (1 John), which is officially anonymous. He may have served as the editor or final author of the Gospel of John.

John the seer (visionary and author of Revelation): We know nothing about this person except what he tells us, that he wrote the

book of Revelation while in exile on the island of Patmos (Rev. 1:1, 9). Though he is often identified with the two persons mentioned above, most scholars think he was probably a completely different individual who just happened to have the same name.

For a contrasting view, see 28.13 “Only One John: The Apostle Who Wrote Five Books.”

28.13

Only One John: The Apostle Who Wrote Five Books

Most scholars who identify the apostle John with “the Beloved Disciple” are willing to grant that person a role (perhaps limited, perhaps pronounced) in the composition of the Gospel of John. However, the strong tendency in scholarship is to associate the three Johannine Epistles with another person named John and the book of Revelation with yet a third person who bore that name:

New Testament Writing	To Be Associated with
Gospel of John	John the apostle
1 John	John the elder
2 John	John the elder
3 John	John the elder
Revelation	John the seer (otherwise unknown)

But a strong minority of scholars contest this.

No Need for a Distinct “John the Elder”

First, the scholars challenge the contention of Eusebius (fourth-century historian) to the effect that John the apostle and John the elder were two different people.

Robert Gundry notes that Eusebius begins by quoting Papias (an early-second-century church leader):

“If anyone came who had followed the elders, I inquired into the words of the elders, what Andrew or Peter or Philip or Thomas or James or John or Matthew or any other of the Lord’s disciples had said, and what Aristion and the Elder John, the Lord’s disciples, were saying.” (Papias, quoted by Eusebius in *Church History* 3.39.4)

Then Gundry says,

Both times that the name John appears, it appears with both the designations “elder” and “the Lord’s disciple.” By contrast, Aristion—even though designated a “Lord’s disciple”—lacks the title “elder” when mentioned alongside John. This contrast points toward a single individual named John. Papias wanted to make plain the single identity of John by repeating the designation “elder,” just used for the apostles but omitted with Aristion; and Papias mentioned John a second time because John was the only one of the Lord’s disciples still living and speaking who was also an apostle. Admittedly, Eusebius interpreted Papias as referring to two different men named John and even claimed a tradition of two men named John and having different memorials in Ephesus. But one and the same person may have more than one memorial and sometimes does.¹

So contra Eusebius and centuries of tradition, John the apostle and John the elder were the same person, namely the person who is called “the beloved disciple” in the fourth Gospel.

No Need for a Distinct “John the Seer”

Most modern scholars do not think that either John the apostle or John the elder wrote Revelation. They attribute the book to yet another John—a person we may call “John the seer”—who is otherwise unknown to us. One major reason is that the book of Revelation exhibits stylistic differences strikingly different from the Gospel and letters.

Gundry writes,

It is true that from a grammatical and literary standpoint the Greek style of Revelation is inferior to that of the Gospel and Letters. But in part the “bad grammar” may be *deliberate*, for purposes of emphasis and allusion to Old Testament passages in Hebraic style, rather than due to ignorance of blundering. In parts the “bad grammar” may also stem from an *ecstatic* state of mind, due to John’s having received prophecies in the form of visions. Or writing as a prisoner on the island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea, he did not have the advantage of an amanuensis to smooth out his rough style, as he probably did have for his Gospel and Letters.²

The minority argument, then, is that one person, John the apostle, elder, and beloved disciple, wrote five books of the New Testament: the Gospel, the three letters, and the book of Revelation.

1. Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament*, 4th edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 257.

2. Gundry, *Survey of the New Testament*, 506–7.

28.14

Who Is the Elect Lady? (Box 28.3)

The second of the Johannine Letters is explicitly addressed to “the elect lady and her children” (2 John 1). Who was this person? Was there some prominent woman in the early church to whom this letter was written?

Some interpreters have thought that the “elect lady” might be the leader of a house church, similar to those churches that are apparently led by Gaius (3 John 1) and by Diotrephes (3 John 9) and by the elder himself.

The more common view, however, is that “elect lady” is a metaphorical expression for the church itself: the lady is the church in some particular vicinity, and her children are the members of that church. In support of this interpretation, scholars note that the elder seems to refer to his own church as the lady’s “elect sister” (2 John 13).

28.15

Accolades for 1 John (Box 28.1)

The New Testament letter of 1 John has been a favorite book of the Bible for many notable persons throughout history.

- Augustine: “This book is very sweet to every healthy Christian heart that savors the bread of God, and it should constantly be in the mind of God’s holy church.”
- Martin Luther: “This is an outstanding epistle. It can buoy up afflicted hearts . . . so beautifully and gently does it picture Christ to us.”
- John Wesley: “How plain, how full, and how deep a compendium of genuine Christianity!”

28.16

1 John 1:8—Claim to Have No Sin

The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus, commonly referred to simply as *Doctor Faustus*, is an Elizabethan tragedy by Christopher Marlowe. It premiered sometime between 1588 and 1593 and has met with tremendous popular and critical acclaim ever since. The play recounts the story of a doctor who sells his soul to the devil in order to achieve power on earth. Dr. Faustus is given ample opportunities to repent and even to renounce the bargain that guarantees his perdition but he refuses, convinced that this is the fate allotted to him. Thus Doctor Faustus adheres to a rather absolutist version of the Calvinist doctrine of predestination. Critics continue to debate whether Marlowe intended the play as an endorsement or critique (mockery) of that doctrine.

In one pivotal scene, Faustus makes his case for why repentance is impossible: he draws on Scripture, reading aloud from Romans 6:23 and 1 John 1:18, the combination of which prove (to him) that there is no hope:

“The reward of sin is death.” That’s hard.

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and there’s no truth in us.” Why then, belike we must sin and so consequently die.

Ay, we must die an everlasting death.

What doctrine call you this? *Che sera, sera,*

“What will be, shall be”? Divinity, adieu!

Act 1, Scene 1, lines 41–47

Of course, any number of theologians (including Calvinists) have wanted to point out Faust’s exegetical errors. For one thing, he quotes only portions of his Bible verses. The fuller readings would be

The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 6:23)

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:8–9)

28.17

1 John 2:17—World Is Passing Away

The Corpus Clock is a large, gold-plated clock constructed as a street-level sculpture outside the Taylor Library at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge University, in England. It is regarded as both a work of art, conceived by John C. Taylor, and as a marvel of science.

Completed in 2008, the clock was unveiled to the public by Cambridge physicist Stephen Hawking. It has no hands or numerals but displays the time by opening slits in the clock face; the slits are arranged in concentric circles to display hours, minutes, and seconds. It was chosen by *Time* magazine as one of the “Best Inventions of 2008” and has since been featured in movies and television programs. It appears to be well on its way to becoming a new Cambridge landmark.

Visually, the clock has these striking features:

- Above the gold-plated face sits a large sculpture of a locust, which moves its mouth in such a way that it appears to be eating the seconds as they pass, periodically blinking its eyes with satisfaction. The insect is officially known as “the Chronophage” or “Time Eater.”
- Less noticeable, a small wooden coffin hangs on the back of the clock. It holds a chain that clanks to sound the hour.

- An inscription beneath the clock reads, “*mundus transit et concupiscentia eius*,” words taken from the Latin Vulgate translation of 1 John 2:17. The meaning in English: “The world and its desire are passing away.”

Taylor conceived the clock more as a work of art than as a timepiece. It is intentionally accurate only once every five minutes. At other times, it lags, catches, stops, and then races to get ahead. Taylor says this is to reflect the irregularities and indeterminacies of life.

In a broader sense, Taylor says he intended the work to be “terrifying”—a constant reminder of the inevitable passing of time. “Basically I view time as *not* on your side. It will eat up every minute of your life, and as soon as one moment is gone it is salivating for the next.”¹

Critics have described the work as both “hypnotically beautiful” and “deeply disturbing.” No doubt the Corpus Clock would have been less terrifying or disturbing if Taylor had included all of 1 John 2:17. The full verse reads, “The world and its desire are passing away, but those who do the will of God will live forever.”

1. John C. Taylor, quoted in “Cambridge’s Fantastical New Clock Even Tells Time.” *Associated Press* (Sept. 19, 2008).

28.18

3 John 3:2—That You May Prosper

Oral Roberts (1918–2009) was a highly successful television evangelist. He founded the Oral Roberts Evangelistic Association and Oral Roberts University. In the latter decades of the twentieth century he became one of the best-known, but also most controversial, religious leaders in America, in part because of his tactics and strategies for fundraising.

Roberts' ministry focused on "seed faith," a philosophy for life enhancement that laid foundations for what is sometimes called "the prosperity gospel movement." Early on he was best known as a faith healer, but he emphasized to an unprecedented extent that divine healing could include miraculous intervention that would bring emotional, social, and financial well-being as well as physical health.

By his own account, Roberts received his call to this style of ministry when he was 29 years old and opened his Bible to 3 John 1:2, which reads, "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in good health, even as thy soul prospereth" (KJV). Roberts took this as a sign that God did not just care about people's spiritual needs but wanted people to be physically healthy and financially prosperous.

29.0

Jude: Outline of Contents

I. Salutation (1–2)

II. Purpose for writing (3–4)

III. Judgment on false teachers (5–16)

IV. Appeal to the community (17–23)

V. Doxology (24–25)

Courtesy of *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, ed. Mark Allan Powell (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 500.

29.1

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29.2

Parallels between Jude and 2 Peter (Box 27.1)

Jude		2 Peter	
v. 4	stole into the community	2:1	bring in opinions secretly
v. 4	long ago designated for condemnation	2:3	condemnation pronounced long ago
v. 4	pervert the grace of God	2:2	way of truth is maligned
v. 4	licentiousness	2:2	licentious ways
v. 4	deny our Master	2:1	even deny the Master
v. 6	angels kept in chains in deepest darkness for judgment	2:4	angels kept in chains in deepest darkness until judgment
v. 7	Sodom and Gomorrah serve as an example	2:6	Sodom and Gomorrah made an example
v. 7	unnatural lust	2:10	depraved lust
v. 8	defile the flesh, reject authority, and slander the glorious ones	2:10	indulge their flesh despise authority and slander the glorious ones
v. 9	archangel did not bring a condemnation of slander	2:11	angels do not bring a slanderous judgment
v. 10	slander what they do not understand	2:12	slander what they do not understand
v. 10	like irrational animals, live by instinct, and are destroyed	2:12	like irrational animals, creatures of instinct, will be destroyed
v. 11	“Woe to them!”	2:14	“Accursed children!”
v. 11	abandon themselves to Balaam’s error	2:15	follow the way of Balaam
v. 11	error for the sake of gain	2:15	wages of doing wrong
v. 12	blemishes on your love-feasts	2:13	blemishes (at your feasts)
v. 12	feast with you without fear	2:13	revel while they feast with you
v. 12	waterless clouds	2:17	waterless springs
v. 12	clouds carried along by the winds	2:17	mists driven by a storm
v. 13	deepest darkness reserved for them	2:17	deepest darkness reserved for them
v. 16	bombastic, flatter people	2:18	bombastic, entice people
v. 17	remember predictions of apostles	3:2	remember commandments spoken through apostles
v. 18	in the last time, scoffers will come, indulging their own lusts	3:3	in the last days, scoffers will come indulging their own lusts

29.3

Infamous Sinners of the Past in Jude (Box 29.2)

Jude associates the intruders who have stolen into the church with six notorious examples from Jewish tradition:

- Israelites in the wilderness (v. 5; cf. Num. 14; 1 Cor. 10:1–11; Heb. 3:7–19)
- angels who mated with women on earth (v. 6; cf. Gen. 6:1–4; *1 Enoch* 6–8)
- citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah (v. 7; cf. Gen. 19)
- Cain (v. 11; cf. Gen. 4:1–16; Heb. 11:4; 1 John 3:12)
- Balaam (v. 11; cf. Num. 22–24; Rev. 2:14)
- Korah (v. 11; cf. Num. 16)

29.4

James and the Other Brothers of Jesus (Box 25.1)

The Synoptic Gospels report that Jesus had four brothers—James, Joses, Judas, and Simon—plus an unknown number of sisters whose names are also unknown (Mark 6:3). Since James is listed first, he is often thought to be the oldest of these brothers, although perhaps he is listed first simply because he was the one who became best known.

The Gospels indicate that the brothers of Jesus did not “believe in him” during the time of his ministry (John 7:5). At one point they attempt to seize him and take him home for a forced retirement from doing and saying things that are leading people to think he is “beside himself” (Mark 3:21, 31–35). The Gospel of John even presents Jesus on the cross choosing one of his disciples to care for his mother after his death, which seems like an affront to James and his other brothers (John 19:25–27).

After Easter, things changed. Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians that the risen Jesus appeared to James (1 Cor. 15:7). The book of Acts indicates that the brothers of Jesus (all of them?) were part of the early church in Jerusalem (Acts 1:14) and, apparently, were present for the great event on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1–4). A short while later, James appears to be the leader of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 12:17; 21:18). He presides over the apostolic

council described in Acts 15 and offers a final authoritative ruling that he expects to be disseminated and accepted by Christians everywhere (Acts 15:19–29; 21:25).

James's importance as a leader in the church is also acknowledged by Paul in Galatians, albeit somewhat grudgingly (Gal. 1:19; 2:6, 9). Paul disagreed sharply with James's policies regarding the continued relevance of certain markers of Jewish identity within the Christian community (Gal. 2:11–14). Still, he devoted a considerable portion of his ministry to supervising a collection for Christians in Jerusalem, where James was the recognized leader (Rom. 15:25–29; 2 Cor. 8–9).

The Jewish historian Josephus reports that James was murdered in 62 (see *Jewish Antiquities* 20.199–201). During an interim between on-site Roman rulers (when “Festus was dead and Albinus was still on the way”), the high priest Ananus II seized the opportunity to move against those whom he considered to be lawbreakers. He convened the judges of the Sanhedrin and delivered James and certain others to be stoned. Josephus notes that “the inhabitants of the city who were considered to be the most fair-minded and who were strict in their observance of the law were offended at this.” Furthermore, Josephus maintains that the action was judged to be illegal, and Ananus II subsequently was deposed by the new procurator on this account. A later Christian tradition, reported by Clement of Alexandria (third century), says that James was killed by

being thrown off the pinnacle of the temple, but this account is generally regarded as legendary.

Other traditions about James emphasize his traditional Jewish piety and his devotion to the law. Eusebius (fourth century) reports that he received his nickname “the Just” because he lived as a Nazirite, an ascetic who was especially devoted to God. Another oft-repeated tradition (reported by Eusebius) holds that James spent so much time praying in the temple that his knees became as calloused as those of a camel.

The apocryphal *Gospel of Thomas* (first or second century) contains an overwhelmingly positive affirmation of James. In one curious passage, Jesus’s disciples ask him who their leader will be after he departs; he answers, “You are to go to James the Just, for whose sake heaven and earth came into being” (*Gospel of Thomas* 12).

We have only a little information about the other brothers of Jesus. Paul refers to them as Christian missionaries, noting specifically that (unlike him) they were married and often accompanied by their wives (1 Cor. 9:5). Judas (= Jude) is the putative author of another New Testament letter.

29.5

Keeping and Being Kept: A Motif in the Letter of Jude

In just twenty-five verses, the letter of Jude refers six times to a motif of *keeping* or *being kept*:

- The readers are kept safe by God for Jesus Christ (v. 1).
- Angels did not keep their proper position when they left heaven for earth (v. 6).
- The rebellious angels are now being kept in eternal chains (v. 6).
- The deepest darkness is being kept (reserved) for false believers (v. 13).
- The readers should keep themselves in the love of God (v. 21).
- God is able to keep them from falling (v. 24).

The overall impression is that God is in control of all things and that, unlike rebellious angels or false believers, the readers should accept what God has ordained. The goal is preservation, not innovation.

29.6

Use of Apocryphal Writings in Jude (Box 29.1)

The Letter of Jude draws on Jewish writings that are not considered to be canonical Scripture by either Jews or Christians.

- Jude alludes to a story found in *1 Enoch*, according to which the angels that mated with earth women to produce a race of giants (reported in Gen. 6:1–4) were imprisoned by God for the day of judgment (v. 6; cf. *1 Enoch* 6–8).
- Jude quotes from *1 Enoch* in a way that indicates he regards the book's prophecies as reliable and true (vv. 14–15; cf. *1 Enoch* 1:9).
- Jude refers to a story in which the archangel Michael had a dispute with the devil over who should take possession of the body of Moses (v. 9).

The book of *1 Enoch* is an apocalyptic Jewish writing from the third century BCE; its contents may also be assumed by 1 Peter 3:18–20.

The tale about the body of Moses is not recorded in any literature available to us, but Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–215) and a number of other early Christian scholars maintain that it was reported in a Jewish work called the *Assumption of Moses*, which was extant in their day. Most contemporary scholars think that this writing was probably part of a Jewish work known to us as the *Testament of Moses*; our manuscripts of the latter work are

incomplete, and the story to which Jude refers may have been contained in the portion that is missing.

Neither *1 Enoch* nor the *Assumption of Moses* belongs to the Old Testament, nor are they part of the collection of books that Protestants call the Apocrypha, some of which are regarded as a secondary canon by Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christians. Today, Jude's reliance on these books usually is viewed as a curious holdover from a time when the concept of canon was still in flux.

29.7

Jude in the Christian Canon

The acceptance of Jude into the canon of Christian Scripture followed a peculiar route: accepted early but then questioned later. The letter is listed without qualification in the Muratorian Canon (ca. 170–210), but a hundred years later Eusebius listed it as one of the “disputed books.”

What would explain this? Scholars think that the letter was initially accepted because it was believed to have been written by a member of Jesus’s family. It was never very popular, however, and its references to Jewish legends and nonbiblical materials made it problematic. Thus by the fourth century many Christians were reluctant to regard Jude as Scripture, even if it had been written by Jesus’s own brother (an ascription that does not appear to have been challenged until modern times).

By the end of the fourth century, the letter’s official acceptance as Christian Scripture was well established, but Jude continued to be regarded with suspicion. At the time of the Protestant Reformation, both Martin Luther and Cardinal Cajetan (Luther’s chief opponent) questioned the legitimacy of Jude as Scripture.

In the modern world, the canonical status of Jude is rarely challenged outright, but the book is often neglected or ignored. It is one of the only books of the New Testament (along with 2 John and

3 John) for which there are no assigned readings in the Revised Common Lectionary; thus in most Christian denominations throughout the world, Jude is never read publicly in worship.

29.8

Authorship of Jude

The short letter of Jude says that it is written by “Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James.” Although other possibilities have been explored, most interpreters concur that this attribution refers to the “Jude” who is identified in the Gospels as one of four brothers of Jesus (Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3) and who, therefore, would also have been a brother of James—the more famous brother of Jesus who became the leader of the church in Jerusalem (see Acts 12:17; 15:13–21; 1 Cor. 15:7; Gal. 1:19; 2:9).

Could Jude Have Actually Written the Letter?

In the past, the letter was often identified as a pseudepigraphical writing simply because the author’s command of Greek surpasses what scholars have thought a Palestinian peasant would have been capable of producing. In recent years, however, there has been increased appreciation for the level of sophistication that such persons may have attained if they were actively engaged with the Roman world, as Jesus’s disciples and siblings appear to have been. There has also been an increased awareness of the role that professional scribes sometimes played in the composition of letters. Thus most contemporary scholars would grant that this letter could have been written by Jude the brother of Jesus if he had the help of an amanuensis.

But this is not the end of the matter . . . many scholars (probably the majority) view the letter as pseudepigraphical—written by some second or third generation Christian who thought he could gain a better hearing for his ideas if he attributed them to a representative of the Holy Family.

Factors Contending against Pseudepigraphical Composition

The authorship of this letter appears to have gone unquestioned in the early church, even by those who had some problems with its contents. Given its polemical character and citations of nonbiblical material, it would never have been included in the canon if there had been any hint or suspicion that it had not actually been written by the brother of Jesus (especially since the main arguments could all be found elsewhere, in a letter attributed to Peter).

Also, a pseudonymous writer would have invoked a more prominent name: Why not write a pseudigraphical letter attributed to James? At the very least, he would have identified himself clearly as the “brother of Jesus” rather than simply as “a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James” (v. 1).

Factors Indicating a Pseudepigraphical Composition

- The author refers to “the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints” (v. 3), suggesting a body of tradition that can be passed from one generation to the next.

- The author urges his readers to “remember the predictions of the apostles” (v. 17), which suggests that he is looking back on the apostolic age as a bygone era.
- The troublemakers who are attacked in the letter appear to have had much in common with second-century gnosticism.

Based on these observations, many scholars think that the Letter of Jude belongs to second- or third-generation Christianity and should be assigned to a time period too late for composition by one of the earthly brothers of Jesus. Those who take the letter to be pseudepigraphical typically date it to a time around 80–120 CE.

Why These Points Might Not Be Decisive

- Paul talks about a body of tradition that he received from others and is handing on to his readers (1 Cor. 15:3), and he does so in a time period when James the brother of Jesus was still alive and active.
- When Jude urges his readers to remember the predictions of the apostles, he is referring to something that “they (the apostles) said to you (the readers).” Thus the assumption is that the readers heard the apostles firsthand, something that would have occurred during the lifetime of the brothers of Jesus.
- We don’t know enough about “incipient gnosticism” to know when gnostic-like ideas began to take hold in early Christian

communities; many of the faults attributed to Jude's opponents are ones addressed in the undisputed letters of Paul, which were all written before 64 CE.

Thus some scholars insist that there is no sure reason for dating this letter to a period after the time when Jude the brother of Jesus could have written it. Indeed, these scholars point to other factors that suggest a relatively early date:

- Allusions to Scripture in the letter reflect knowledge of Hebrew manuscripts rather than dependence on the Greek Septuagint, and the Hebrew Bible was used most prominently in Palestine (where the brothers of Jesus lived) prior to 70.
- The author draws on nonbiblical Jewish traditions (vv. 6, 9, 14–15), the relevance of which would decline for believers as the Christian church continued to develop.
- The author believes he is living in the last days (v. 18), a perspective that became less prominent among Christians as time passed.

Scholars who argue that the letter is not pseudepigraphical, but an authentic composition by Jude the brother of Jesus, usually view it as contemporaneous with Paul's letters in the 50s and early 60s.

We may also note that a few scholars maintain the date of the letter's composition has little bearing on the question of authorship: if

Jude was one of Jesus's younger brothers (he is listed last in Matt. 13:55 and third in Mark 6:3), he could realistically have lived until the end of the first century.

29.9

Which Jude? Jude Confusion in the Bible and in the Church

The Letter of Jude identifies its author as “Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James” (v. 1). Two people are known to us who might fit that designation.

Jude the Brother of Jesus

Jesus had four brothers: James, Simon, Joseph, and Jude (Matt. 13:55). While Jesus was alive on earth, Jude probably would not have been referred to as “Jude, the brother of James”; he would have been called “Jude, the brother of Jesus” (out of respect for the eldest sibling). But after Jesus’s death, it would have been natural for him to be called “Jude the brother of James,” since James would now be his oldest living brother. This would be especially likely in view of his brother James becoming widely known throughout the Christian world as the leader of the Christian church.

As a Christian, Jude may also have thought it inappropriate to refer to himself as “Jude, the brother of Jesus” because, like other Christians, he thought of himself as “a servant of Jesus.” But he may have continued to identify himself as a “brother of James” even after that sibling was martyred (ca. 62).

Jude the Disciple of Jesus

One of Jesus's twelve disciples was named Jude (Luke 6:16; John 14:22; Acts 1:13), and, by coincidence, this Jude was also related to someone named "James." The Greek expression used to identify him in Luke 6:16 (literally, "Jude of James") probably means "Jude the son of James," but it was translated "Jude the brother of James" in the KJV. Thus, in that particular translation of the Bible, Jesus has both a brother who could be called "Jude the brother of James" and a disciple who could be called "Jude the brother of James," though these are clearly two different people.

Throughout the centuries, almost all biblical interpreters have thought that the "Jude the brother of James" identified as the author of the Letter of Jude is the first of these two figures—the Jude who was one of Jesus's four siblings, not the Jude who was one of his twelve disciples. Not surprisingly, however, there has been considerable "Jude confusion" over the years; the two Judes often are mixed up, and sometimes they are morphed together into one person, such that Jesus ends up calling one of his four siblings to be one of his twelve disciples.

29.10

Who Were the Troublemakers Denounced by Jude?

The Letter of Jude was written to denounce people referred to as “intruders” who “have stolen in among” the faithful believers (v. 4). But who were these people? What did they teach—or what did they do that was so offensive?

How the Troublemakers Are Described

Here is how the troublemakers are described within the letter:

- “intruders” (v. 4)
- “people who long ago were designated for this condemnation” (v. 4)
- “pervert the grace of our God into licentiousness” (v. 4)
- “deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ” (v. 4)
- “dreamers” (v. 8)
- “defile the flesh” (v. 8)
- “reject authority” (v. 8)
- “slander the glorious ones” (v. 8)
- “slander whatever they do not understand” (v. 10)
- “destroyed by those things that, like irrational animals, they know by instinct” (v. 10)

- “go the way of Cain” (v. 11)
- “abandon themselves to Balaam’s error for the sake of gain”
(v. 11)
- “perish in Korah’s rebellion” (v. 11)
- “blemishes on your love-feasts, while they feast with you
without fear, feeding themselves” (v. 12)
- “waterless clouds carried along by the winds” (v. 12)
- “autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, uprooted” (v. 12)
- “wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own
shame” (v. 13)
- “wandering stars, for whom the deepest darkness has been
reserved forever” (v. 13)
- “ungodly sinners” (v. 15)
- “grumblers and malcontents” (v. 16)
- “indulge their own lusts” (v. 16)
- “bombastic in speech” (v. 16)
- “flattering people to their own advantage” (v. 16)
- “scoffers, indulging their own ungodly lusts” (v. 18)
- “worldly people” (v. 19)
- “devoid of the Spirit” (v. 19)
- “causing divisions” (v. 19)

Wow! That's a lot of problems! Do we know of any group that might have been described by a Christian writer in all of these ways?

Some of the descriptors are so generic that they don't offer much help, but interpreters have seized on other points to hazard a few guesses. The problem is that, thus far, no one explanation accounts for more than a few of the attributes (while failing to account for others).

Some Suggestions

False Christians (Not Unbelievers)

Jude calls the troublemakers "intruders" (v. 4) and says that they participate in the love-feasts of the church (v. 12). Thus it is usually thought that these troublemakers would have claimed to be Christians, a claim Jude may have contested. Jude says that they deny Jesus Christ (v. 4) but probably means that they do so through their ungodly behavior rather than overtly.

Libertine Christians

Jude says that the troublemakers "pervert the grace of our God into licentiousness" (v. 4). Thus they might be libertine Christians who confuse forgiveness with permissiveness and adopt an attitude similar to what Paul caricatures as continuing in sin "in order that grace may abound" (Rom. 6:1; cf. 3:8; 6:15; 1 Cor. 6:12; 10:23; Gal. 5:13). They follow their own animal instincts (Jude 10) and yield willingly to lusts of the flesh (vv. 8, 18; cf. 7, 16). If this is the case, then the specific problem with their participation in community meals

could be that they behaved as they would at a pagan banquet or secular association.

Hyperspiritual Christians

Jude also refers to the troublemakers as “dreamers” (v. 8) who reject authority (v. 8) and slander what they do not understand (v. 10). This might mean that they are hyperspiritual Christians who place more value on their own ecstatic and visionary experiences than they do on other sources of religious authority (e.g., Scripture, apostolic tradition, community consensus, decisions of elders). If so, then Jude’s description of them as worldly people who are devoid of the Spirit (v. 19) is ironic: they are the opposite of what they claim to be (cf. Col. 2:18).

Semiconverted Gentiles

Jude’s extensive use of Jewish traditions suggests that he is writing to Jewish Christians. If this is the case, then the “intruders” could be gentiles who have been only partially converted from paganism, accepting certain elements of the Christian gospel but rejecting Jewish morality and, perhaps, retaining pagan notions of revelation and enlightenment.

Incipient Gnostic Christians

New Testament scholars have often sought to identify the troublemakers with followers of gnosticism, a variant expression of

Christianity that held sway in the second, third, and fourth centuries.

Such an identification, however, requires a fairly late date for the letter, later than most scholars are willing to allow. In recent years, the tendency has been to identify the troublemakers with a more unofficial and undeveloped form of “incipient gnosticism”: they espoused some of the same ideas that would be part of the gnostic religion some decades later.

Conclusion

A few scholars have abandoned the quest to identify the troublemakers in Jude, asserting that they must have been some localized group whose actual attributes can never be reconstructed from the letter’s polemical rhetoric. Others have even claimed that the troublemakers are a mythical group: the point of the letter is not to oppose a specific heresy but to warn believers against all manner of false teachers and evildoers who might appear in the last days.

Most interpreters, however, hold that the people denounced by Jude were actual historical persons troubling a particular congregation at a specific place and time. The suggestions above give strong clues to their identity and are not all mutually exclusive.

A fairly safe assessment would indicate that the troublemakers were gentiles who had been attracted to Christianity and become part of a Jewish Christian community. They indulged heavily in what they took to be “Christian spirituality” but rejected Jewish moral codes and espoused a version of the faith that struck Jude as a slightly

Christianized form of paganism. Further, they actively propagated this version of the faith, presumably with some success. Although they could not know it, many of their ideas would find even more success in the near future, when gnostic versions of the Christian religion took hold and spread throughout the empire.

29.11

Jude 12—Clouds without Water

Aleister Crowley (1875–1947) was a British aficionado of the occult who founded the religion of Thelema and identified himself as the prophet who would lead humanity into the aeon of Horus. He is said to have been influential on Anton LeVey's conception of satanism and on L. Ron Hubbard's development of Scientology.

In 1910 Crowley published a book of poems titled *Clouds without Water*, and in case people would not notice the allusion to Jude 12, he printed Jude 12–13 (from the KJV) as an inscription on the first page:

Clouds they are without water; carried about of winds; trees
whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the
roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame;
wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness
forever.

Apparently, Crowley chose this title and inscription in an attempt to goad or mock the pious who regarded him as the sort of false teacher about whom Jude had wanted to warn his readers.

30.0

Revelation: Outline of Contents

- I. Prologue (1:1–8)
 - A. Preface (1:1–3)
 - B. Opening of a letter (1:4–6)
 - C. Prophetic sayings (1:7–8)
- II. Vision of Christ with seven messages (1:9–3:22)
 - A. Vision of Christ (1:9–20)
 - B. Seven messages (2:1–3:22)
- III. Visions of heaven and seven seals (4:1–8:5)
 - A. Vision of God (4:1–11)
 - B. Vision of the Lamb (5:1–14)
 - C. Seven seals (6:1–8:5)
- IV. The seven trumpets (8:2–11:19)
- V. Seven unnumbered visions (12:1–15:4)
- VI. The seven bowls and Babylon (15:4–19:10)
 - A. Seven bowls (15:4–16:21)
 - B. Babylon (17:1–19:10)
- VII. Seven unnumbered visions and Jerusalem (19:11–22:5)
 - A. Seven unnumbered visions (19:11–21:8)

B. Jerusalem (21:9–22:5)

VIII. Epilogue (22:6–21)

A. Sayings (22:6–20)

B. Benediction (22:21)

Courtesy of *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, ed. Mark Allan Powell (New York:

HarperCollins, 2011), 880.

30.1

Revelation in the Revised Common Lectionary

Text	Series	Liturgical Occasion	Calendar Date
1:4–8	C	Easter 2	1 Sunday after Easter
1:4b–8	B	Christ the King	Nov. 20–26
5:11–14	C	Easter 3	2 Sundays after Easter
7:9–17	C	Easter 4	3 Sundays after Easter
7:9–17	A	All Saints' Day	Nov. 1
21:1–6	C	Easter 5	4 Sundays after Easter
21:1–6a	B	All Saints' Day	Nov. 1
21:10, 22–22:5	C	Easter 6	5 Sundays after Easter
22:12–14, 16–17, 20–21	C	Easter 7	6 Sundays after Easter

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30.3

Revelation and Other Johannine Writings

Similarities

- Jesus as “the Word” (John 1:1, 14; 1 John 1:1; Rev. 19:13)
- Jesus as “Lamb of God” (John 1:29; Rev. 5:6–14)
- application of Zechariah 12:10 to Jesus (John 19:37; Rev. 1:7)
- Jesus as “faithful witness” (John 5:32; 8:14; 1 John 5:9; Rev. 1:5; 3:14; 19:11)
- use of “I am” sayings (John 6:35, 51; 8:12; 9:5; 10:7, 9, 11, 14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1, 5; Rev. 1:8, 17; 21:6; 22:13, 16)
- Jesus present with God from the beginning (John 1:1–2; 1 John 1:1; Rev. 3:14)
- Jesus referring to God as “my God” (John 20:17; Rev. 3:2, 12) and “my Father” (John 5:17, 43; 14:2; Rev. 2:28; 3:5, 21)
- Jesus giving living water (John 4:10, 14; 7:37–39; Rev. 7:17; 21:6; 22:1)
- Jesus as lamp or light (John 8:12; 9:5; 1 John 2:8; Rev. 21:23–24)
- portrayal of Jewish opponents as false Jews who serve Satan (John 8:39–47; Rev. 2:9; 3:9)
- linked to Asia Minor (Revelation to Patmos; Gospel and letters to Ephesus)

Differences

- Revelation has a vastly different literary style, much less refined with regard to vocabulary, grammar, and syntax.
- Key themes from John's Gospel are absent from Revelation: no reference to "new birth," "eternal life," "knowing the truth," "abiding in Christ," or even "believing."
- The way of using Scripture differs: John's Gospel often quotes from the Old Testament; Revelation is rich in Old Testament imagery but never cites Scripture as such.
- The overall theological emphases are different: unlike Revelation, the Gospel of John shows little interest in such future events as the final judgment or the second coming of Christ.

30.4

Symbolism in Revelation

Some symbols found in Revelation are interpreted for us:

- seven lampstands are churches; seven stars are angels
(1:20)
- four horses are conquest, slaughter, famine, death (6:1–8)
- red dragon is Satan (12:9)
- seven heads are seven mountains, but also seven kings
(17:9–10)
- ten horns are ten kings yet to receive their kingdoms (17:12)
- the woman is “the great city” (17:18)

Colors can have symbolic associations:

- white = victory or purity (1:14; 2:17; 3:4–5, 18; 4:4; 6:2, 11; 7:9, 13–14; 14:14; 19:11, 14; 20:11)
- red = destruction (6:4; 12:3), bloodshed (6:12), fire (9:17)
- purple = royalty, luxury (17:4; 18:12, 16)
- scarlet = perverse luxury (17:3–4; 18:12, 16)
- black = mourning (6:5, 12)
- pale green = death (6:8)

Numbers can have symbolic associations:

- 3 = the spiritual realm (8:13; 16:13; 21:13)

- $3\frac{1}{2}$ = tribulation (11:9; cf. Dan. 7:25; 9:27; 12:7); likewise, 1,260 days = 42 thirty-day months or $3\frac{1}{2}$ years (Rev. 11:3; 12:6)
- 4 = the earth (4:6–8; 5:6, 8, 14; 6:1–8; 7:1–2, 11; 9:13–15; 14:3; 15:7; 19:4; 20:8; 21:16)
- 6 = failure (13:18 [three sixes])
- 7 = perfection or completion (1:4, 12, 16, 20; 3:1; 4:5; 5:1, 6; 8:2; 10:3; 11:13; 12:3; 13:1; 15:1, 7; 17:9); but sometimes 7 appears to signify Rome, which was built on seven hills (12:3; 13:1; 17:3, 7, 9, 11)
- 10 = totality (2:10; 12:3; 13:1; 17:3, 7, 12, 16)
- 12 = Israel (12:1; 21:12–14 21; 22:2); likewise 24 (4:4, 10; 5:8; 11:16; 19:4) and 144 (7:4–8; 14:1–5; 21:17)
- 1,000 = a very great number; thousands of thousands = unimaginably large (5:11); 144,000 = a large Jewish multitude (7:4–8; 14:1–5); 7,000 = a “complete” large number, as many as necessary (11:13); 1,000 years = a very long time (20:2–7)

Animals can have symbolic associations:

- lamb = sacrifice (5:6–8, 12–13; 6:1, 16; 7:9–10, 14, 17; 8:1; 12:11; 13:8, 11; 14:1, 4, 10; 15:3; 17:14; 19:7, 9; 21:9, 14, 22–23; 22:1, 3)
- lion = might, royalty (5:5; 10:3; cf. 13:2)

- eagle = perseverance, victory (8:13; 12:14)

Imagery often recalls the Old Testament:

- trumpet blasts (1:10; 4:1; 8:2–11:15): see Exodus 19:16–19; Joel 2:1
- blackened sun, moon like blood, falling stars (6:12–13): see Isaiah 13:10; 50:3; Joel 2:10
- plagues (8:7–9:20): see Exodus 7:17; 9:18; 10:4, 21
- hybrid beast (13:2): see Daniel 7:4–6

Some imagery is simply poetic and doesn't appear to stand for anything specific:

- “a rainbow that looks like an emerald” (4:3)
- “a sea of glass, like crystal” (4:6)

What Is the Purpose of the Symbolism?

The symbols probably are not a secret language intended to conceal the message from potential enemies. Symbolism is simply the most appropriate language for conveying the fantastic and mysterious nature of what is being revealed. The symbols offer more vague association than direct correspondence, and even when we “get” the symbols, we may feel like there is much that we don't understand.

That is partly the point.

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30.5

Some Common Features of Apocalypses (Box

30.1)

- pseudonymous
- addressed to persons experiencing suffering and persecution
- seek to motivate faithfulness in a time of crisis
- heavy use of symbolism, including numbers and colors
- engagement with otherworldly beings, such as angels and demons
- bizarre menagerie of fantastic creatures
- spiritual or supernatural visions, often interpreted by otherworldly beings
- portentous dreams that must also be interpreted
- mystical journeys from the earthly plane to a heavenly or spiritual realm
- review of history with ultimate culmination linked to the present era
- secrets revealed about imminent cosmic transformations
- forecast of cosmic catastrophes
- liturgical settings and elements, such as altars, temples, hymns

- unveiling of the true-but-hidden character of present circumstances
- radically dualistic outlook: clear distinction between good and evil with no ambiguity
- deterministic view of history: all proceeds according to a preordained divine plan
- pessimistic forecast for the world as is: things will go from bad to worse
- hope for a favored remnant lies in radical divine intervention

30.6

Prophetic Literature and Apocalyptic Literature

The Bible contains both prophetic literature and apocalyptic literature. This chart shows some of the key differences between those two genres.

	Prophetic Literature	Apocalyptic Literature
examples in the Bible	Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos	Daniel 7–12, Revelation
period of biblical history when most prominent	monarchy, exile, return	intertestamental period, Christian era
situation addressed	God’s people are coming under judgment for failure to keep the covenant	God’s people are being persecuted for faithfulness, but some are turning apostate
basic message	Repent! Obey God! Keep the covenant!	Keep the faith! Persevere until the end comes!
audience addressed	Israel	the elect
mode of communication	oracles that reveal the will of God in clear, deliberate terms	visions that convey God’s plan with symbolic imagery
view of history	reformable	irredeemable
the “day of the Lord”	propitious moment in history; coming soon	cataclysmic end of history; coming soon
understanding of the world	basically positive; just needs to be reformed	completely negative; needs to be destroyed or replaced
cause of suffering	unfaithfulness	faithfulness
cure for suffering	human repentance; seek what is good; shun what is evil	divine resolution; ultimate victory of good over evil
the plan of God	to establish God’s reign within history	to establish God’s reign beyond history
content of “hope”	restoration of God’s people, to continue living in God’s world in the way that God desires	removal of God’s people to a new sphere of existence, in which God’s will is done
process of salvation	deliverance wrought by God acting within history, through historical persons	deliverance wrought by God acting at end of time, through spiritual intermediaries
ethics	fundamentally communal; nation is to enact justice,	basically individualistic; the one who endures to

	live as God's covenant people	the end will be saved
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Other Apocalypses

Sample Jewish Works

1 *Enoch* (third century–first century BCE): Enoch (from Gen. 5:24) reports on things that he has witnessed in heaven, including astronomical phenomena and preparations for a great judgment to be carried out by one identified as the Son of Man (cf. Dan. 7:9–14).

Apocalypse of Abraham (first century CE): Abraham reports visions granted to him long ago, including ones that explain why God would allow the temple to be destroyed and ones that preview the ultimate vindication of the righteous in the aftermath of that tragedy.

2 *Baruch* (first century CE): Baruch (the scribe of Jeremiah) recounts visions of the future that depict the successive kingdoms to come, from Babylon to Rome, and describe the ultimate coming of the messiah after a time of calamity.

Apocalyptic elements are found also in the Old Testament books of Ezekiel (40–48), Zechariah (1–8), and Daniel (7–12).

Sample Christian Works

Shepherd of Hermas (second century CE): A Roman named “Hermas” reports five visions, twelve sets of commandments, and ten parables (or similitudes) given to him by an angel who appeared to him in the form of a shepherd.

Ascension of Isaiah (second century CE): This work describes the martyrdom of the prophet Isaiah and his ascent into heaven, where he is witness to Jesus leaving heaven for earth and returning when his work is done.

Apocalypse of Peter (second century CE): Jesus provides Simon Peter with a guided tour through hell and heaven, recounting in some detail the torments and blessings to be found in those places.

Apocalyptic elements are found also in an “eschatological discourse” of Jesus recorded in the Synoptic Gospels (Matt. 24:4–51; Mark 13:3–37; Luke 21:8–36).

For a good collection of Jewish apocalypses, see James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, *Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983). For Christian apocalypses, see Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures: Books That Did Not Make It into the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

30.8

Gematria (Box 30.2)

The practice of “gematria” consists of assigning a numerical value to a word or phrase by adding together the values of the individual letters. This works in Hebrew and in Greek, where the letters of the alphabet can also serve as numerals. In Greek, the marks signifying 6 and 90 were not used as letters in New Testament times.

Hebrew Letters

א = 1

ב = 2

ג = 3

ד = 4

ה = 5

ו = 6

ז = 7

ח = 8

ט = 9

י = 10

כ = 20

ל = 30

מ = 40

נ = 50

Ϟ = 60

ϙ = 70

Ϛ = 80

ϛ = 90

Ϝ = 100

Ϟ = 200

ϟ = 300

Ϡ = 400

Greek Letters

A α = 1

B β = 2

Γ γ = 3

Δ δ = 4

E ε = 5

F Ϝ = 6

Z ζ = 7

H η = 8

Θ θ = 9

I ι = 10

K κ = 20

Λ λ = 30

Μ μ = 40

Ν ν = 50

Ξ ξ = 60

Ο ο = 70

Π π = 80

Ϛ Ϛ = 90

Ρ ρ = 100

Σ σ = 200

Τ τ = 300

Υ υ = 400

Φ φ = 500

Χ χ = 600

Ψ ψ = 700

Ω ω = 800

In the Roman world, gematria became a basis for riddles, jokes, and games.

- Graffiti on a wall in Pompeii reads, “I love her whose number is 545.”
- As a political joke, Suetonius (*Nero* 39) indicates that the name “Nero” (Νέρων) and the phrase “killed his own mother” (ιδίαν μητέρα ἀπέκτεινε) have the same numerical value

(1,005) when written in Greek. This was pertinent because the emperor was rumored to have murdered his mother.

In Christianity and Judaism, gematria could provide a basis for religious symbolism.

- Rabbis noted that “Eliezer” (אליעזר), the name of Abraham’s favored servant (Gen. 15:2), has a numerical value of 318, which is the total number of servants mentioned in Genesis 14:14. Thus Eliezer was the equal of all the rest of the servants combined.
- The Hebrew letters in the name “David” (דוד) add up to 14, so that number could be accorded messianic significance: the Messiah was to be the Son of David. This is probably why Matthew’s Gospel emphasizes that the genealogy of Jesus can be divided into three sets of fourteen generations (Matt. 1:17).
- The Greek letters in the name “Jesus” (Ἰησοῦς) add to 888, which some early Christians found significant: eight surpasses seven (the number for perfection) and heralds a “new creation” beyond what God did in the first seven days (Gen. 1:1–2:3).

Many scholars think that gematria holds the clue to resolving the puzzle of 666, the number attributed to the beast in Revelation 13:18.

30.9

2 Baruch—No Wine Shortage in the Age to Come

A Jewish document written about the same time as the book of Revelation contains its own description of what the messianic age would be like. A key point seems to be that there will be *lots* of wine! But there will also be something to eat and daily marvels to behold:

The earth will also yield fruits ten thousandfold.
And on one vine will be a thousand branches,
and one branch will produce a thousand clusters,
and one cluster will produce a thousand grapes,
and one grape will produce a cor of wine.
Those who are hungry will enjoy themselves*
and they will, moreover, see marvels every day.

2 Baruch 29:5–6

*So-stated it sounds like the hungry will have so much wine to drink that they will no longer care about their hunger, but this is probably not the point. The writing goes on to say, “the treasury of manna will come down again from on high, and they will eat of it.”

Wine and manna—with marvels every day.

30.10

Revelation in the Christian Canon

The book of Revelation had some trouble gaining acceptance as a work of Scripture. Our knowledge on this subject is limited, but from what resources we do possess, two observations stand out.

First, Revelation appears to have met with initial acceptance and then came to be questioned later on. In our earliest list of canonical writings, the Muratorian Canon (ca. 170–200), Revelation is listed as a book that is to be received as Scripture. But about a hundred years later (ca. 311), when the church historian Eusebius prepared a list of writings accepted by Christians as Scripture, he indicated that Revelation was a “book that some reject but others judge to belong.”

Second, Revelation appears to have been endorsed by certain official spokespersons but challenged at other levels. In 367, Athanasius, the prominent bishop of Alexandria, included Revelation without any hesitation in his list of twenty-seven books to be regarded as Christian Scripture. And in 393, a regional council, known as the Third Synod of Carthage, ratified that list, declaring those books to be the canon of Christian Scripture. Nevertheless, a Christian poet from this same period, Amphilocus of Iconium, refers to Revelation as a book “that some approve, but most say is spurious.”

What was the problem? There seem to have been a few difficulties with the book:

- Revelation often was popular with Christians given to expressions of the faith that others would regard as religious fanaticism. In the second century, it was a popular book with the Montanists, a charismatic group that stressed prophecy and the imminence of the end times, but that was ultimately judged to be a heretical sect. We know of at least one second-century leader in the Roman church, Gaius, who thought that the book of Revelation should be rejected on this account.
- The authorship of the book was uncertain. Dionysius, a third-century Egyptian bishop, maintained that Revelation could not have been written by the same person who wrote the Gospel of John. He based his argument on linguistic and literary analysis, but he did not care for the theology of Revelation either and thought that the book should be rejected.
- Many leaders in the early church (including Dionysius, but also Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and Irenaeus) believed that the book of Revelation taught a doctrine called “chiliasm.” In a nutshell, chiliasm envisions the rewards of Christians in materialistic or political terms; Revelation was believed to support this doctrine by promising the faithful that they would

participate in a thousand-year reign on earth with Christ.

Supporters of chiliasm made much of this, and as a consequence, opponents of the controversial doctrine were less inclined to view Revelation as authoritative Scripture.

- The book of Revelation takes a very harsh and negative view toward the Roman Empire and toward governing authorities in general. Eventually this became an uncomfortable problem for churches that were maintained and supported financially by Christian emperors.

30.11

Authorship of Revelation

Unlike most apocalypses, Revelation does not pretend to be written by some famous religious figure from the distant past. The person responsible for this book identifies himself as a Christian named John who was on the island of Patmos “because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus” (1:9). The latter reference probably indicates that he had been banished from the mainland for witnessing to his faith and sent into exile on this island. But who was this man? Even in the early church there was no agreement as to which John wrote the book of Revelation.

The Tradition of Apostolic Authorship

Several early authorities (Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, Polycrates) volunteer that the John who received this vision on Patmos may have been John the apostle, one of Jesus’s twelve disciples. This seemed sensible for a couple of reasons. First, similarities can be traced between Revelation and the Gospel of John, which was commonly thought to be the work of the apostle. Second, various traditions connected the apostle John with the city of Ephesus, which is not very far from Patmos and is the location of one of the churches addressed by the book.

In time this tradition of apostolic authorship for Revelation became firmly established in Christian piety, and it has been widely reflected in popular expressions of the Christian faith (hymns, artwork, etc.).

The Challenge to Apostolic Authorship

Even in the early church, however, there were voices that challenged this identification. In particular, Dionysius of Alexandria (third century) thought that the literary styles of Revelation and the other Johannine writings were so distinct that the same person could not have written both. Over time, the tradition came to be discounted by scholars for many reasons.

- The literary and linguistic style (as noted by Dionysius) is in fact radically different. Revelation is less refined in terms of its use of Greek grammar, vocabulary, and syntax.
- Key themes from John's Gospel are completely absent in Revelation. There is no mention in the latter of "eternal life," of "knowing the truth," or even of "believing."
- The author of Revelation uses Scripture differently than does the author of John's Gospel. The Gospel quotes Scripture frequently, whereas Revelation is rich in biblical imagery but never actually cites Scripture as such.
- The theological perspectives of Revelation and the Gospel of John are completely different. For example, the Gospel of John evinces very little interest in such future events as the

final judgment or the second coming of Christ—themes that dominate Revelation.

- The author of Revelation actually refers to the apostles (18:20; 21:14) without any indication that he is one of them. Indeed, if the twenty-four elders mentioned in 4:4 are to be identified as the twelve patriarchs of Israel and the twelve apostles of Jesus, then are we to imagine that John is watching himself among their company?
- Most scholars also think that this book was written in the 90s, and they question whether the apostle John is likely to have lived to so advanced an age (if, indeed, he escaped the martyrdom that Jesus predicts will befall him in Mark 10:39).
- The book of Revelation had considerable trouble finding acceptance in the Christian canon of Scripture. This would not have been the case if authorities in the early church had thought that it could be traced with any confidence to the apostle John.

Minority View: Supporters of Apostolic Authorship

Apostolic authorship of this book is not impossible, and a few prominent interpreters hold to it:

- D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 700–707.

- Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 932–48.
- Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, rev. ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).
- Stephen S. Smalley, *Thunder and Love: John's Revelation and John's Community* (Milton Keynes, UK: Word, 1994).

The most significant defense of apostolic authorship is found in a work cited by many of the above authors and yet to be translated: Gerhard Maier, *Die Johannesoffenbarung und die Kirche*, WUNT 25 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1981).

These supporters of apostolic authorship think that the differences (literary and theological) between Revelation and John's Gospel can be attributed to the diverse circumstances under which the books were composed. John's Gospel was produced under controlled and ideal conditions; the apostle may have used a secretary (as Paul did for his letters), or he may have written only an early draft that later was expanded and edited. Revelation, by contrast, perhaps preserves the apostle's unedited work, possibly produced while he was in an ecstatic state.

Despite such explanations, however, most scholars think that attributing Revelation to the apostle John is a stretch. As an alternative, some scholars suggest that the book could have come from John the elder, another first-century Christian who may have written the Johannine Letters and served as a final editor for John's

Gospel. The dominant trend in recent scholarship, however, has been to view the author of Revelation as simply a Christian prophet named John who is otherwise unknown to us.

What We Can Gather from the Book Itself

The preference of most scholars is not to make claims for the book of Revelation that it does not make for itself. The book does not claim to be written by the apostle John, and so we should not make that claim for it (or imply that its authority somehow rests on the establishment of such a claim).

Scholars do seek to surmise what they can about the author from the book itself. These facts may be noted:

- He is steeped in the Old Testament.
- He is more familiar with the imagery and style of Jewish apocalypses than any other first-century Christian author.
- He appears to write Greek as one whose native language was Hebrew or Aramaic. Accordingly, it seems possible that he may have been a Jewish Christian from Palestine who emigrated to Asia Minor at some point during or after the Jewish war with Rome.
- He assumes that the churches in Asia Minor will regard him as a prophet (1:3; 22:7, 10, 18–19). He does not feel the need to do or say anything to establish his credentials; thus

he must be well known and respected among Christian congregations in that part of the world.

Conclusion

The author of Revelation was a Jewish Christian named John who addressed fellow Christians living in Asia Minor during the last third of the first century. He was regarded as a prophet by these Christians, and he may have served them in an itinerant capacity similar to that described for the prophet Agabus in Acts 21:10–11. Eventually he ended up on the island of Patmos, probably banished from the mainland by political authorities. There he had a vision that he put into writing and sent to the churches.

30.12

Three Persons Named John?

Many scholars identify three individuals named John in early Christianity, all of whom are associated with different New Testament writings.

John the apostle (the son of Zebedee): He and his brother James were called to be among Jesus's first disciples (Mark 1:19–20). He ministered alongside Peter (Acts 3–4) and came to be known as a pillar of the church (Gal. 2:9). Some people believe he may be “the disciple whom Jesus loved,” whose testimony is incorporated into the Gospel of John (John 21:24).

John the elder (author of the three epistles?): We hear of this person in writings from the early church, including Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History*. He is said to have belonged to the same community as John the apostle and to have been the apostle's disciple (such that the two were often confused by later generations). He is probably the “elder” responsible for at least two of the Johannine epistles (2 John 1:1; 3 John 1:1). Most scholars think he also wrote the first of those letters (1 John), which is officially anonymous. He may have served as the editor or final author of the Gospel of John.

John the seer (visionary author of Revelation): We know nothing about this person except what he tells us, that he wrote the book of

Revelation while in exile on the island of Patmos (Rev. 1:1, 9).

Though he is often identified with the two persons mentioned above, most scholars think he was probably a completely different individual who just happened to have the same name.

For a contrasting view, see 30.13 “Only One John: The Apostle Who Wrote Five Books.”

30.13

Only One John: The Apostle Who Wrote Five Books

Most scholars who identify the apostle John with “the Beloved Disciple” are willing to grant that person a role (perhaps limited, perhaps pronounced) in the composition of the Gospel of John. However, the strong tendency in scholarship is to associate the three Johannine Epistles with another person named John and the book of Revelation with yet a third person who bore that name:

New Testament Writing	To Be Associated with
Gospel of John	John the apostle
1 John	John the elder
2 John	John the elder
3 John	John the elder
Revelation	John the seer (otherwise unknown)

But a strong minority of scholars contest this.

No Need for a Distinct “John the Elder”

First, the scholars challenge the contention of Eusebius (fourth-century historian) to the effect that John the apostle and John the elder were two different people.

Robert Gundry notes that Eusebius begins by quoting Papias (an early-second-century church leader):

“If anyone came who had followed the elders, I inquired into the words of the elders, what Andrew or Peter or Philip or Thomas or James or John or Matthew or any other of the Lord’s disciples had said, and what Aristion and the Elder John, the Lord’s disciples, were saying.” (Papias quoted by Eusebius in *Church History* 3.39.4)

Then Gundry says,

Both times that the name John appears, it appears with both the designations “elder” and “the Lord’s disciple.” By contrast, Aristion—even though designated a “Lord’s disciple”—lacks the title “elder” when mentioned alongside John. This contrast points toward a single individual named John. Papias wanted to make plain the single identity of John by repeating the designation “elder,” just used for the apostles but omitted with Aristion; and Papias mentioned John a second time because John was the only one of the Lord’s disciples still living and speaking who was also an apostle. Admittedly, Eusebius interpreted Papias as referring to two different men named John and even claimed a tradition of two men named John and having different memorials in Ephesus. But one and the same person may have more than one memorial and sometimes does.”¹

So contra Eusebius and centuries of tradition, John the apostle and John the elder were the same person, namely the person who is called “the beloved disciple” in the fourth Gospel.

No Need for a Distinct “John the Seer”

Most modern scholars do not think that either John the apostle or John the elder wrote Revelation. They attribute the book to yet another John—a person we may call “John the seer”—who is otherwise unknown to us. One major reason is that the book of Revelation exhibits stylistic differences strikingly different from the Gospel and letters.

Gundry writes,

It is true that from a grammatical and literary standpoint the Greek style of Revelation is inferior to that of the Gospel and Letters. But in part the “bad grammar” may be *deliberate*, for purposes of emphasis and allusion to Old Testament passages in Hebraic style, rather than due to ignorance of blundering. In parts the “bad grammar” may also stem from an *ecstatic* state of mind, due to John’s having received prophecies in the form of visions. Or writing as a prisoner on the island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea, he did not have the advantage of an amanuensis to smooth out his rough style, as he probably did have for his Gospel and Letters.”²

The minority argument, then, is that one person, John the apostle, elder, and beloved disciple, wrote five books of the New Testament: the Gospel, the three letters, and the book of Revelation.

1. Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament*, 4th edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 257.

2. Gundry, *Survey of the New Testament*, 506–7.

30.14

The Date of Revelation: Clues within the Book Itself?

Scholars have questioned whether the book of Revelation was written during the reign of Nero (54–68) or that of Domitian (81–96). The latter idea was the common view of the early church and remains the favored position today. But arguments can be advanced in support of the earlier time period (Nero).

Some scholars have thought that certain clues to the dating of Revelation may be found within the book itself.

Revelation 17:9–11

Revelation 17:9–11 is usually thought to refer to the Roman emperors and to enumerate them as follows: “five have fallen, one [i.e., the sixth] is living, the other [i.e., the seventh] has not yet come; . . . an eighth . . . belongs to the seven.”

Some scholars suggest that this means that the emperor at the time the book of Revelation was written was the sixth Roman emperor (the one who was “still living”), and Nero was the sixth emperor.

Unfortunately, this does not solve the problem with absolute certainty. For one thing, Nero can be counted as the sixth emperor only if one begins the list with Julius Caesar. Julius did begin the line of Caesars, but he did not rule the empire in a manner that would

necessarily merit his inclusion as one of the numbered rulers in this passage. Most historians would say that, strictly speaking, Caesar Augustus was the first Roman emperor (which would make Nero the fifth). In any case, the passage is perhaps too poetic or symbolic to provide an absolute chronology: it could mean that the sixth emperor (Nero?) is still living in some metaphorical sense (his influence continues to be felt).

Revelation 11:1–2

Scholars have also pointed out that Revelation 11:1–2 portrays the temple as still standing, which would make more sense if John was writing before 70 (when the temple was destroyed). But others point out that John is reporting a visionary experience, and it is quite possible that his visions include elements from Israel's past without concern for historical anachronism. Furthermore, the city of Rome is referred to in this book as "Babylon" (14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2, 10, 21), an epithet that would make more sense after the temple had been destroyed (by Rome, just as an earlier temple had been destroyed by Babylon).

Conclusion

Neither of these points is considered to be decisive, though for some scholars they give more credence to the hypothesis of an earlier date for Revelation than might be assumed otherwise.

30.15

Church and State: Revelation as an Example of the Ethic of Resistance

Biblical studies on how the New Testament perceives church-state relationships identify three distinct stances that are commended in different New Testament writings:

1. the ethic of subordination (found in the letters of Paul and in 1 Peter)
2. the ethic of resistance (found in Johannine writings and, especially, Revelation)
3. the ethic of critical distancing (found in the Synoptic Gospels)

Here we look at the ethic of resistance. For the other two views, see 1.19 and 1.20.

Summary Description of the Ethic of Resistance

In the Gospel of John,

We hear that Jesus's coming is a judgment on the world (9:39; 12:31), which is inhabited by sons of darkness (12:35–36); for the world is incompatible with Jesus (16:20; 17:14, 16; 18:36) and with his Spirit (14:17; 16:8–11). In short, the world hates Jesus and his followers (7:7; 15:18–19; 16:20). Jesus refuses to pray for the world (17:9); rather, he overcomes the world (16:33) and drives out the Satanic Prince of this world (12:31; 14:30).¹

In the book of Revelation, the political implications of such a view are drawn out, as political structures are understood to be instruments of demonic injustice and of profound misuse of wealth and power. In response, the church is encouraged to withdraw from society in every possible way, to avoid any compromise with worldly powers, and to strive to implement what is godly in direct opposition to that which an ungodly society seeks to produce.²

Key Texts Expressive of This Ethic

John 15:18–19:

(Jesus says) “If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you. If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. Because you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world—therefore the world hates you.”

1 John 2:15–17:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. The love of the Father is not in those who love the world; for all that is in the world—the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches—comes not from the Father but from the world. And the world and its desire are passing away, but those who do the will of God live forever.

Revelation chapters 13, 17, 18:

In Revelation 13 the seer paints his apocalyptic portrait of the state with the image of two beasts. . . . The first beast arises out

of the sea (13:1), the symbol of chaos, the abyss of demonic forces. Its claim to authority is derived from the dragon (Satan), from whom the beast has received absolute power and domination. This is the great Antichrist, the empire itself and the individual emperors who rule. . . . The second beast arises out of the earth (13:11) and acts wholly under the authority of and in the service of the first beast (13:12). John is describing the local and regional representatives of Rome in Asia Minor who promote the imperial cult and who otherwise serve as puppets of the imperial regime. . . . A second image of the imperial state is the great whore. The image first appears in Revelation 17. This is Rome, the eternal city, the invincible conqueror of the world. But in John's vivid imagination, the imperial whore is the great seducer and corrupter of the earth—and she is “drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the witnesses to Jesus” (17:6). . . . The third image of the state in Revelation is Babylon. All of Revelation 18 revolves around the fall of Babylon, and 18:9–20 presents three laments by those who had gained most from Babylon's wealth and power: The first lament comes from the kings of the earth, condemned for living in luxury. . . . The second lament comes from the merchants, who benefitted from an international commerce that created abundant wealth for a relatively small minority while the masses of the empire's population lived in dire poverty. . . . The third lament comes from the shipbuilders and those who prospered from their trade.”³

Some Common Observations Regarding This Ethic

- The apparent antipathy to the world in the Gospel of John must be balanced by John's assertion that "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son" and by the insistence that "God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him" (John 3:16–17).
- The counsel to avoid the world in the Johannine Gospel and epistles is not articulated with specific reference to politics or to governmental affairs. The main concern seems to be moral: Christians are not to live in the same way that those who "belong to the world" are apt to live.
- The book of Revelation is usually understood as depicting church and state relations during a time of crisis, when the church is experiencing persecution from the state. The question is asked whether the response of the church presented there would be appropriate "for all seasons."

Walter Pilgrim observes,

Revelation does not teach an escapist ethic of irresponsibility toward history. Instead, it intends to motivate and encourage action toward greater justice on behalf of suffering believers and all humanity. And though it advocates resistance, it is nonviolent resistance patterned after the suffering of the Lamb.⁴

1. Raymond Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 63.

2. Walter Pilgrim, *Uneasy Neighbors: Church and State in the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 151–61.
3. Pilgrim, *Uneasy Neighbors*, 152.
4. Pilgrim, *Uneasy Neighbors*, 178.

30.16

Millennium, Tribulation, Rapture (Box 30.4)

In Revelation 20:1–10 John sees a vision in which Satan is bound and some Christian martyrs are raised from the dead. Faithful saints reign with Christ for one thousand years, and then Satan is released, but only to be cast in the lake of fire following a final battle.

Throughout the centuries Christians have adopted various positions with regard to what this vision of the “millennium” means:

- *Premillennialism*. Christ returns before the millennium: his faithful saints rule with him on earth for one thousand years after the second coming but prior to the final judgment and establishment of the new kingdom.
- *Postmillennialism*. Christ returns after the millennium: his faithful saints will successfully evangelize the world and rule it in peace for one thousand years before Christ’s second coming.
- *Amillennialism*. Christ returns without any literal millennium: his faithful saints experience spiritual victory symbolized in Revelation as a triumph equivalent to a thousand-year reign.

Premillennialists take a futurist approach to interpreting Revelation and sometimes try to relate their understanding of the book to two other eschatological events: the “tribulation” (a seven-year period of woes thought to be described in Rev. 6–9 and specifically mentioned

in Dan. 9:27; Rev. 11:2–3) and the “rapture” (a miraculous removal of God’s faithful from the earth thought to be referenced in Matt. 24:40–41; 1 Thess. 4:15–17; Rev. 4:1). Thus premillennialism yields subcategories:

- *Pretribulationism*. The rapture will come prior to the onset of the tribulation (so the unfaithful who are left behind will receive a wake-up call regarding what is now to come).
- *Midtribulationism*. The rapture will come at some midpoint during the tribulation (so the faithful may regard any onset of terrible woes as a possible sign that the rapture is near).
- *Posttribulationism*. The rapture will come after the tribulation, at the time of Jesus’s second coming (so even the faithful should expect to endure suffering prior to Christ’s return).

30.17

Revelation 16:16—Where Is Armageddon? A Biblical Detective Story

According to Revelation 16:16, a great and final cosmic battle will be fought between the forces of good and evil at a place called Armageddon (pronounced ahr´muh-ged´uhn). But locating this place is not a simple matter.

The word “Armageddon” is a transliteration into Greek of an unknown Hebrew word (*har magedon*). The NRSV actually renders it as Harmagedon, but almost all other English translations use Armageddon. There is, however, no place known to us that was called either Armageddon or Harmagedon.

It is usually recognized that the Hebrew words *har magedon* would mean Mount Magedon, but this is of little help, since no mountain by that name is known to us. For this reason, many scholars have thought there must have been some corruption of the biblical text over the years as it was being copied. Indeed, many variant readings for “Armageddon” are found in different manuscripts, as though some copyists were not completely sure what they should write. Thus a popular suggestion is that the text might have read *har megiddon* in the original manuscript, which we no longer possess, and that this was copied wrong at a early stage of transmission.

If the above suggestion is correct, then the expression could be translated Mount Megiddo. We are still not done, however, because we have no evidence elsewhere of any mountain by that name either. There was, however, a city named Megiddo—and the well-known Mount Carmel was only five miles northeast of that city. Maybe Mount Carmel was sometimes called Mount Megiddo by people who lived in that area.

So:

if our copies of the book of Revelation preserve a misspelling (*har magedon*) of a word that should have been written *har megiddon*, and

if Mount Megiddo was an alternative name for Mount Carmel known to the author and original readers of Revelation,

then the problem could be solved: the final battle will take place on or near Mount Carmel, near the city of Megiddo.

We may note that Megiddo was the site of many well-known ancient battles:

- Deborah and Barak versus the Canaanite king Sisera (Judg. 5:19; cf. 4:12–16)
- Jehu versus Ahaziah (2 Kings 9:27)
- Josiah versus Neco (2 Kings 23:29)

Mount Carmel (Megiddo?) was also the site of the contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:19–40). Accordingly, the site may have seemed an appropriate location for the ultimate conflict to occur.

It is also possible, however, that the term *har magedon* means something else. Some scholars have suggested it could mean “Mount of Assembly” or “His Fruitful Mountain,” in which case no specific location could ever be identified. Some scholars think that is the whole point: the reference is metaphorical and no literal spot on earth was ever intended.

All the same, tour buses stop outside the ancient city of Megiddo on a regular basis to let tourists snap photos of where guides assure them the world will some day come to an end.

30.18

The “Book of Life” in Country Music

Revelation speaks of a “book of life” that contains the names of those who will be saved from damnation or apocalyptic distress: Jesus says to the church in Sardis, “If you conquer, you will be clothed like them in white robes, and I will not blot your name out of the book of life; I will confess your name before my Father and before his angels” (Rev. 3:5).

John sees a vision of the beast and notes that “all the inhabitants of the earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slaughtered” (Rev. 13:8).

John sees in his vision of the last judgment that

another book was opened, the book of life. And the dead were judged according to their works, as recorded in the books. And the sea gave up the dead that were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and all were judged according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire; and anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire. (Rev. 20:12–15)

John sees a vision of the new Jerusalem and says, “Nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life” (Rev. 21:27).

But Revelation is not the only book in the Bible to refer to this important volume. In his Letter to the Philippians, the apostle Paul says that Euodia and Syntyche “have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.” Phil. 4:3).

The image has captured the attention of country music songwriters, especially those with a gospel or religious bent, including Chuck Butler, who wrote the lyrics of “Ballad of the Lukewarm” as performed by Country Faith; Steve Wiggins, who wrote the lyrics for “Personal Judgment Day” as performed by Big Ten Revival; and Terry Scott Taylor, who wrote the lyrics of “Wall of Heaven” as performed by The Lost Dogs. Richie Furay, founding member of Buffalo Springfield and Poco, even mentioned the “Book of Life” in an interview with me when talking about being inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame:

You go into that museum and they have this wall with all these names: Elvis and Ray Charles and John Lennon . . . and there’s my name—on the wall with the others! It gives me a thrill. But, you know, it’s nothing compared to knowing my name is written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.

30.19

Revelation 4:15–16—In Praise of Lukewarm Religion

In Revelation 3:15–16 Jesus condemns the church of Laodicea for being lukewarm in its embrace of the faith: “I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth.”

While preachers have often taken up Jesus’s charge when urging their congregations to greater zeal, lukewarm religion has not been universally regarded as a bad thing.

Thomas Hardy

Thomas Hardy, in his novel *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1874), introduces a character named Gabriel:

On Sundays he was . . . one who felt himself to occupy morally that vast middle space of Laodicean neutrality which lay between the Communion people of the parish and the drunken section.
(chap. 1)

The Jesus of Revelation would urge Gabriel to make up his mind and join either the “Communion people” or the drunkards. But in the early twentieth century, he would be joined by two noteworthy advocates of lukewarmness.

Samuel Butler and George Bernard Shaw

In his 1903 novel *The Way of All Flesh*, Samuel Butler tells of a character named Ernest who comes to the conclusion that both religious extremism and anti-religious zealotry are equally harmful. At one point, Ernest writes an essay, declaring,

We should be churchmen, but somewhat lukewarm churchmen, inasmuch as those who care very much about either religion or irreligion are seldom observed to be very well bred or agreeable people. The Church herself should approach as nearly to that of Laodicea as was compatible with her continuing to be a Church at all, and each individual member should only be hot in striving to be as lukewarm as possible. (chap. 85)

The above citation became somewhat famous in its own day, and about two decades later received an endorsement from the famous playwright George Bernard Shaw in the preface to his work *Back to Methuselah* (1922):

The world is kept sane less by the saints than by the vast mass of the indifferent, who neither act nor react in the matter. Butler's preaching of the gospel of Laodicea was a piece of common sense founded on his observation of this.

30.20

Revelation 13:16–18—Who Might Bear the Number 666? (Box 30.3)

Most Bible scholars think that the number of the beast, given as 666 in Revelation 13:18 (or 616 in some manuscripts), employed the system of gematria (see EXPLORE 30.8) to designate a hostile Roman emperor:

- A popular spelling for the name of the emperor Nero adds up to 666 when written in Hebrew (קסר נרון = Caesar Neron). An alternative spelling (קסר נרו) = Caesar Nero) adds up to 616, a variant reading for the number of the beast found in some manuscripts of Revelation.
- A designation for the emperor Domitian that sometimes appeared on Greek coins also adds up to 666: *A. Kai. Domet. Seb. Ge.* (an abbreviation for *Autokratōr Kaisar Dometianos Sebastos Germanikos* = Emperor Caesar Domitian Augustus Germanicus).

But Bible readers throughout history have sought to determine if there might be anyone in their contemporary world who bears the number of the beast. In the second century, Bishop Irenaeus warned the church to be wary of anyone named “Evanthas,” “Lateinos,” or “Teitan,” because the letters of those names in Greek equaled the fateful sum. Later, in the thirteenth century, some Franciscans noted

that the Greek name of Pope Benedict XI (*benediktos*) made him suspect for the same reason. Some Protestant Christians in the twenty-first century would likewise cast aspersions on Pope Benedict XVI.

But why would the name have to be in Hebrew or Greek? English systems of gematria also exist: it was noted in the 1960s that “Kissinger” (President Richard Nixon’s secretary of state) is a name that equals 666 in English gematria.

In recent years, beast hunters have set computers to work on this problem, and the pool of potential beasts now includes phenomena in addition to proper names. Words or phrases whose letters produce the ominous number (in accord with English gematria) include “computer,” “New York,” “US of America,” and “SS Number.”

Guesses can also be made without any appeal to gematria. Former US president Ronald Wilson Reagan was once identified as a candidate for the beast simply because he had six letters in each of his three names—and then after he left the presidency he moved to a house located at 666 St. Cloud Road (his wife later had the address changed to 668).

Finally, since an English “w” is equivalent to the Hebrew letter *vav*, which has a numerical value of six, some pundits have wondered whether “www” is not just another way of writing 666, in which case the beast could be the internet.

30.21

Revelation 14:19 and *The Grapes of Wrath* (Box 30.5)

Did you ever wonder about the title of John Steinbeck’s 1939 novel *The Grapes of Wrath*? The book focuses on the hardships of tenant farmers during the Great Depression, but what exactly are “grapes of wrath”?

The book’s title was inspired by a line from “The Battle Hymn of the Republic,” composed by abolitionist Julia Ward Howe in 1861:

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord: He is
trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored.

But that line in itself makes little sense unless one realizes that it is an allusion to Revelation 14:19:

The angel swung his sickle over the earth and gathered the
vintage of the earth, and threw it into the great wine press of the
wrath of God.

The biblical verse describes divine judgment meted out on those who have oppressed and exploited others: they will themselves be oppressed by God’s avenging angel. The vision of judgment day as an awful, final harvest also recalls the words of Jesus in Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43.