

The Gospels

Frank A. Nemeč, Jr.

May 9, 2012

These notes on the gospels began as a compilation of material in preparation for Ken Gilbert's class at Valley Church, Cupertino, California, on a harmony of the Gospels in 2009. This work begins with Ken's famous disclaimer. Don't believe anything I say. Study for yourself. Sometimes I play the role of "Devil's Advocate", expressing a view that isn't necessarily mine. I invite argument against any such view, but I expect any argument to be reasoned, supported, and substantive, and based on something more solid than doctrine. Visit your church library and your local public library. Anyone who is honestly and openly studying to understand these writings will encounter these views. Unless otherwise stated, many of the sources cited or quoted here represent a consensus of serious modern scholars of the Bible texts. Though we may not agree with all of them, we should be aware of them, and have good reasons for maintaining divergent views.

Brief History of Israel

A loose confederation of Semitic tribes led by judges coalesced into a kingdom, ruled first by Saul, of the tribe of Benjamin, around 1020BC. The tribal city-state lifestyle of the Semitic peoples had narrowed within Israel by the teachings and writings of the Mosaic priesthood. The accounts of military conquests and the narrowness of the religious practices had given this people a 'national' identity by differentiating them from their neighbors. The credit for forming a strong, unified monarchy of both the northern and southern tribes is usually given to David, around 1006BC. This lasted around 76 years, until around 930BC, when the kingdom split into Israel (north) and Judah (south). Israel lasted until around 720BC, when it was conquered by the Assyrian Empire. The people were carried off into captivity. Assyria required its captives to abandon their own religions and adopt the religion of the Assyrians. These 'lost' tribes of Israel merely lost their unique identity and their religion as they were assimilated. Judah lasted until 586BC, when it was conquered by the Babylonian Empire. The Babylonians were more accommodating, and allowed their captives to continue to practice their own historic religious traditions, as long as they didn't rebel politically, and as long as they put in a good word for Babylon in their prayers. This captive Jewish population became the core of the Diaspora (dispersion). A very striking transition happened with the Babylonian captivity. With the proclamation of Isaiah, their god, the God of Israel, became God with us. That is, JHWH changed from a typical regional god with regional influence, to a god of a people, wherever they were. The Jews of the Diaspora were quite happy with this. In 538BC, Cyrus the Great issued the Edict of Restoration, allowing those Jews who desired to return to their original land (Judah), and to rebuild their temple. Most of the Jews stayed behind in Babylon. The governor of this Yehud Province even donated 1000 golden darics (from his personal funds) to the rebuilding project.

Meanwhile, back in Judah, the Jews which were not carried captive to Babylon continued to practice Judaism. They held sacred only Torah (not all of Tanakh, Talmud etc.). Since the

temple was destroyed, they worshiped mostly on Mount Gerizim. They consider themselves as having the true religion, not the Judaism of the Diaspora. The Jews who returned from captivity considered them half-breeds. In the gospels, we know them as the Samaritans.

Culture and Language

By the first century, Israel had become a cultural mix. Except perhaps for the Levitic priesthood, tribal distinctions within the 'nation' had largely disappeared due to intermarriage. Ken thinks people knew their tribal heritage through the male line. During their sojourns, they also blended with their neighbors (or captors). But it was nearly all within the Semitic family, which included the Arabs, Assyrians, and Babylonians as well as the Hebrews. The Jews of first-century Israel were those from the Diaspora. When they returned, their language was Aramaic, a Semitic language like Hebrew, but with a strong influence from Babylonia and Assyria. A common belief was that the language of the Jews of this area was still Aramaic. More recent scholarship is showing that, by the time of Jesus, Jews of the region had already reverted to Hebrew, at least for religious matters. The writings of the Mishnah at the time were nearly all in Hebrew, giving strong indication that this was the preferred language of religious teachings and writings among the Jews. Bivin and Blizzard suggest that the Jews who had not been taken captive, but stayed in the land or went to nearby lands, maintained the Hebrew language, and that by the time of Christ, those who had returned from captivity were well on their way to reverting to Hebrew, at least for the religious matters. For this and many other reasons, Bivin and Blizzard (and other linguists) believe the synoptic gospels (mainly the parables) were written in Hebrew. They cite many examples which make no sense in Greek, and don't follow Greek syntax and practices, but which make perfect sense when viewed as sloppy, mechanical translations of Hebrew into Greek. This innocent little book was an eye-opener for me. But that was only the beginning. I read a lot more about Jewish rabbinic thought and dialog of the time of Jesus. Suddenly all those passages which had been problematic for years made a lot of sense, and were consistent. What little we have of the sayings of Jesus is very thoroughly consistent with those of a first-century rabbi of the school of Hillel. The arguments were typical of those between Hillel and Shammai (rather, their schools of thought). (See also Young, *Meet the Rabbis*, p. 10 and 20.) I think that applies primarily to the parables and other direct teachings and sayings of Jesus, less so to the gospel texts as a whole.

Then came Alexander the Great around 330BC. Along with the military conquest came the strong influence of Greek culture, thought, and language. This persisted through the entire Hellenistic period to around 150BC. Next comes conquest by the Roman Empire, which exerted political domination but hadn't been around long enough yet to have a major cultural or linguistic influence. Greek was still the language of commerce of the early Roman Empire, especially the eastern part. The cultural backdrop for the time of Christ was broadly Semitic, narrowly Hebrew, with a strong Greek influence. Jesus and His peers most likely spoke Aramaic for routine matters and Hebrew for religious matters. The rural areas Jesus frequented had little reason to learn Greek, and the 'poor' with whom the Pharisees associated had little spare time from their work to learn another language.

The gospel parables and the rabbinic parables of the time are part of a single body of literature, written in Hebrew in a unique style. They must be studied together, as the total set of writings in this unique genre. (Young, Parables, p. 31)

The oldest complete manuscripts date from around 325BC, with tiny fragments claiming dates near 70AD. They are in Greek, so their authors (or translators) very likely used the Septuagint when quoting OT passages, even if Jesus was speaking Judeo-Aramaic when discussing them. No original (or near-original) manuscripts have ever been discovered. If the original writing was in Aramaic or Hebrew, we have no manuscripts of them, even copies. But see the notes above regarding Hebrew as the likely original language of the teachings of Jesus, especially the parables.

At the time of Christ, the Semitic languages may have still been related closely enough so that people could understand their neighbors. To 'speak in tongues' it might have been sufficient to enunciate clearly and use common vocabulary, as one should do when speaking to any diverse group.

Religious Philosophy

In this section, I review fundamentals of religious thought of the Mediterranean region, from earliest Israel and before, through very early Christianity of around the second century AD. All of the Semitic religions of the Ancient Near East had a common motif. The things we don't understand (rain, fertility, victory in battle) are controlled by the gods. If you want things to go your way, you need to please or appease the gods. That always required sacrifice. It rarely required adherence to a moral code. Judaism was relatively unique in this respect.

Israel accepted the Sinaitic Covenant, offered by God. To get the promised blessings, all they had to do, as a nation, was to keep the terms of the covenant. That meant obeying Torah. Joshua 24 expresses that covenant well.

The texts of the Old Testament make it very clear that the people of Israel were not monotheistic. For much of their history they were polytheistic, like all their neighbors. According to the texts, they chose henotheism when they accepted the Sinaitic Covenant. They freely acknowledged that there were many gods. With this covenant, they chose to accept a henotheistic covenant offered by their main god, the God of Israel. Their neighbors saw no problem worshiping a variety of gods. Presumably, before this point, neither did the tribes of Israel. The change was that they were to receive special benefits from the God of Israel in return for their choosing to worship this god exclusively. Some use the term monolatry for this relationship. But the relationship prevailed until deuterio-Isaiah around the 6th century BC. That seems to be the first recorded indication of Jewish religious thought moving to monotheism.

Fast-forward to first-century Judah. The geography and people of the synoptic gospels are those restored by Cyrus in 538BC. It's those Jews of the Diaspora who chose to return to Judah, rebuild Jerusalem and its temple, and resume traditional Jewish worship and sacrifices there.

This culture of this people in this time and place is called Second Temple Judaism. In the gospels, we hear almost exclusively about the common people (the 'poor'), who follow the teachings of the Pharisees. This philosophical segment of Judaism strongly emphasized the study and obedience of Torah. This is the philosophy represented in the synoptic gospels. It's the philosophy held by this population throughout the life of Jesus. Around 28AD, during the earthly ministry of Jesus, Israel is not a politically autonomous kingdom. Most of the people were quite content with that, as they were in the Diaspora. But some Zealots wanted political independence. A person who brought that about would qualify for the role of a messiah. In history, there were two types. The political led the armies in victory over their enemies. The prophet convinced the people to return to obedience to God. When that happens, God can stop applying the promised cursings and resume applying the promised blessings.

In Jesus's day, who were these disobedient people who were responsible for the cursings from God (in place of blessings)? Not the Gentiles. God never held Israel accountable for the actions of the Gentiles. It was the Jews living among them but not practicing Judaism, not obeying Torah. The rabbis had a name for these people: sinners. That's what they meant by the word. That is, not offering the required sacrifices, observing the required feasts and ceremonies, following the dietary law, properly observing Sabbath, and so on. To repent meant to resume doing those things. It meant you were upholding your part of the Mosaic Covenant. And that meant that God could bless Israel instead of cursing Israel. Don't confuse that with the New Testament meaning of the word.

John the Baptist was aiming at the prophet role, pleading with people to repent, so that the Kingdom of God (a politically-autonomous nation) could be brought into being. Jesus carried on this ministry. The early teachings of Jesus match very well those of John the Baptist. Others, Zealots (the fourth sect), sought to incite people to rebel against Rome using military means. The people dissatisfied with Roman rule were looking for people to fill a role of messiah to bring about the Kingdom of God. Some looked for the prophetic, some the military, and some for a single person who did both. A book I recently read (I'll include a reference when I find it) suggests that John the Baptist (Matthew 11, Luke 7) was actually asking Jesus if he was to fulfill both roles, or if there would be another to fulfill the military role. Jesus includes a reference to Isaiah 61:1, "to bring good news to the poor", but stops short of the rest of the verse, "to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of prison to those who are bound". Ken Gilbert suggests this message from Jesus to his cousin was "No such luck, you are stuck in prison, I'm not getting you out." The view of the book (and my view) is that Jesus was saying "My role is that of the prophet, not that of the military leader."

Conflict among these factions of Judah was strong and continuous. From their experience in Diaspora, many were quite satisfied to remain under Roman political rule, just as they were satisfied to remain under Babylonian rule. Others believed certain demands of Rome went too far, conflicting with their Jewish religious views. Of this group, some pursued the prophetic solution: convince sinners to return to proper Jewish worship, thus permitting God to fulfill earlier promises of political independence. Others pursued the military solution, overthrowing Rome by military means. Rome ruthlessly wiped out all such attempts.

Understanding just these ideas is enough to understand nearly everything shown as the teachings of Jesus in the synoptics. But even the synoptics were written at least a couple of decades after the crucifixion, in Greek, to Greeks, for the purpose of showing what kind of person these evangelists believed Jesus to be. Their intent was not to record history. For these reasons, ideas of later Christianity found their way into the gospel narratives. Further, the gospels go to great lengths to explain in several ways why these ideas seemed unknown during the lifetime of Jesus. If God were among us, why didn't we know it? Why didn't even his direct disciples know it?

The ideas of Christianity come to us first from Paul. If Paul got them from someone else, we have no clear record of it, even from Paul. Proposed sources include some interaction with original apostles, oral tradition from those apostles, and 'directly' from Jesus by way of dreams. When I say the ideas of Christianity are the ideas of Paul, this is what I mean. If Paul was not the origin of the ideas, he was the funnel through which they passed on the way to us. A few are attributed to Peter by the author of Luke / Acts. I am convinced by the evidence that practically none of these ideas were known in Judah during the lifetime of Jesus.

The non-synoptic gospel of John, representing Christian thought of 90-95+ AD, has the most incidents of conflict relating to the idea of deity of Jesus. But as Hurtado notes, "In some passages, controversies over divine claims for Jesus are situated within the time of Jesus' own activities, but scholars widely agree that these particular controversies more likely (and directly) emerged in the historical context of early Jewish-Christian efforts to promote claims about Jesus among fellow first-century Jews." (Hurtado, p. 52)

This is especially true if all they read is the writings of evangelists of a new, different religion claiming that a person, one of their own rabbis, was actually a god, in some mysterious way the same god as the God of Israel. The early Jesus Movement, a sect of Judaism, met in the synagogues. Christianity, either a metamorphosis of the Jesus Movement or a new religion of the Greek world whose god was identified with the Jewish God, or something in between, was justifiably forbidden to meet in the synagogues. That happened AD90-95 for the Jerusalem synagogue. These evangelists are the ones criticizing a strawman caricature of Second Temple Judaism.

The chart below shows the philosophical memes in transition. The gray box represents the emergence of Christian thought, influenced by both Jewish and Greek thought. Unfortunately, practically no sources survive today to tell us how this transition took place. Hurtado argues that the ideas are of mostly Jewish origin, but in my view, he inadvertently presents evidence which much better supports greater Greek influence. Even before I read Hurtado, I had noticed that the ideas of Christianity much more closely resemble peer Greek religious ideas than Jewish. Christianity experienced its earliest growth in the Greek world, not in Judea. All of the New Testament texts were written in Greek (except the parables, as noted elsewhere). Hurtado believes Christianity is a 'mutation' of Judaism. Here, I suggest it is more a synthesis of thought from Jewish, Greek, Gnostic, and others.

Jewish	Sadducees	██████	Slaughtered	by Rome	AD 70
Thought	Essenes				
	Pharisees				Modern rabbinic Judaism
				Christian	
				Thought	
Greek					
Thought					

The foundational idea of Christianity is the one-time, once-for-all offering of Jesus as a sacrifice to provide remission of sin and to fulfill any present or future requirement for a sacrifice to be offered to God. The idea of this kind of sacrifice was already appearing in Greek thought at the time. Some held that the only kind of being that would qualify as such a sacrificial offering would be a god. For Christianity to be acceptable in this arena, Jesus would need to be portrayed as a god. The very limited historical record about Jesus tells us only that Jesus was executed by Rome, and that some of his followers were worshiping him as a god. Pliny the Younger testified of this in AD 112, saying that the followers of Jesus would “chant antiphonally a hymn to Christ as to a god” (Epistles 10:96, cited in Hurtado p. 13). The beginning of this idea is what I consider the beginning of Christianity as a new religion. For lack of detail about any credible alternative, as I explain in the previous paragraph, I describe Paul as the source of the idea.

For an excellent, fairly conservative account of how (and how early) the idea of Jesus as God came about, read the reference (Hurtado). Hurtado cites the work of Wilhelm Bousset (see Hurtado p. 16) as representative of the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule* school of thought. His 1913 work, *Kyrios Christos*, “located the emergence of the worship of Jesus in early 'Hellenistic Gentile' circles, among whom a background of pagan reverence of demigods and divinized heroes could have provided the crucial atmosphere, model, and influence. Bousset posited such circles of Gentile Christians in Syria in the early/middle decades of the first century CE. In his view, it was the religious faith of these Hellenistic Gentile Christians that also shaped the beliefs of the Apostle Paul.” From his first chapter onward, I think Hurtado inadvertently makes some good arguments that Christianity did not originate in Second Temple Judaism.

Hurtado (p. 185) later cites Dunn, a “prominent New Testament scholar.” Hurtado writes and quotes, “Citing the Apostle Paul as an important case, Dunn insists that along with recognizing Paul’s ‘debt to both Jew and Greek for the great bulk of his language and concepts,’ we also have to grant ‘the creative power of his own religious experience – a furnace which melted many concepts in its fires and poured them forth into new moulds Nothing should be allowed to obscure that fact.’” I trust Hurtado would approve of my diagram above. Hurtado continues, “the cognitive content of religious ‘revelations’ is often, perhaps characteristically, a reformulation or reconfiguring of religious convictions.”

Chronology

The time scale should be evaluated in view of the human lifespan at the time. In classical Greece and Rome, it was 20-30 years, perhaps a little different in the middle east. The Herods ranged from 40-70 years, probably benefiting from the privileges of rank.

5BC	birth of Jesus
8	Jesus interacts with the leaders of the temple
29	Jesus begins public ministry
33	crucifixion (27-33)
50's	Paul's letters
70	destruction of Jerusalem and the temple (September)
70+	first gospel (Mark) (some argue earlier) (65-75)
73	fall of Masada (April 16?)
70-85	Matthew published, relying on Mark and other sources
80-95	Luke probably written, based on Mark and Matthew
89-95+	fourth gospel (John) probably written
98	Emperor Nerva decrees that Christians need not pay the annual tax upon the Jews, recognizing Christianity as distinct from Judaism, removing them from the Jewish exemption from civic pagan rites, opening the way for persecution for refusal to participate in the Roman Imperial cult.
112	Pliny the Younger, Bithynia (modern Turkey) notes Christianity distinct from Judaism (since they don't pay the Jewish tax), but still obscure
132-6	Bar Kokhba revolt
203	martyrdom of Perpetua. Christianity has grown enough to be a recognized entity in the Roman Empire.
313	Constantine proclaims the Edict of Milan, proclaiming religions toleration in the Roman Empire.

With the possible exception of Mark if the very early date is correct, all the gospels came relatively late in Christian history, 35-70 years after his death. (Spong p. 67)

Jesus was acting as a teacher, master, and rabbi. He would be collecting a cadre of students to study and learn with him, as was the custom of the day. Since he did not claim lineage from Levi, I suspect he wouldn't be working or training as a priest. His students would tend to be youth, starting around age 12, before they settled into careers or families, much as we do high school and college today. The teachings would be limited to the domain of Hebrew writings. They were already learning and apprenticing their trades through their family. The fishermen

who 'left their nets' to follow Jesus (Luke 5:11) were not necessarily abandoning their occupations. But it appears they left others do the task of cleaning up after the day's fishing.

In the early years, there wouldn't be anything fundamentally new in His teachings. He would teach what He was taught, using the Hebrew writings, and applying it to daily life, as His peers would do, and as today's preachers do. He could use his position as a Hebrew scholar to authoritatively declare God's position on issues, on the basis of the Hebrew writings. For this, He needed neither the office of a prophet, nor specific (unique) revelation from God. We have none of His writings, or those of any of his peers. Striking, for such an influential persona. Hillel the Elder (traditionally 110BC-10AD, with his best known activity 30BC-10AD), by comparison, was influential in the development of the Mishnah and the Talmud. In many cases, the absence of rabbinic writings from this period was due to their assessment that oral Torah was too sacred to write down. That assessment also placed full control of the passing on of these traditions into the hands of the religious leadership.

As time went on, Jesus taught moral precepts of behavior in the rabbinic style, notably in the Sermon on the Mount. His common theme was exemplified by His teaching on hate. You think you're doing OK and pleasing God as long as you don't take the life of an innocent human. But if your attitude is that of hate and anger without cause, you're missing the point (and missing the mark). This was consistent with the You try to be good at obeying the letter of the law, and even get ridiculous with your tithes of mint and anise, but you need to pay more attention to the spirit of the law. From what I've learned so far, the actual teachings of Jesus were very much in the style and tradition of the rabbinic teachings of the day. This parallels what preachers do today. His students would become trained in His reasoning and His arguments, and becoming qualified to teach in His place. He sent them out twice for what we would call an industrial co-op, for on-the-job experience. Their final graduation was forced by His execution. Some would move on to begin their careers in the family craft in which they apprenticed. Some would collect disciples of their own.

The teachings of Jesus are best understood in the context of the thought and teachings of his peers, rabbis of the Second Temple period of Judaism. The best introduction I have found so far is Meet the Rabbis by Brad H. Young, details in the references. I won't try to repeat his work here. His scholarship is direct, intensive, peer-supported and respected.

Jesus was deep into His ministry before He ever started talking about any uniqueness of Himself, putting off questions with things like "My time is not yet." He needed time to establish His credentials and to develop His team and message, before facing the distractions to His team and His audience from people trying to discredit, destroy, and kill Him.

In my personal opinion, there is no reason to expect that Jesus' contemporaries knew or understood the concepts presented in the New Testament, written well after the crucifixion. The teachings of Jesus should be understood in the context of his audience. He taught in the synagogues, in the fields, and by the sea. Many suggest that the 'explanations' of the parables were added by the diarists, not necessarily claiming that the explanations were given by Jesus at

the time. They would be presented adjacent to the parables for instructional clarity.

Ironic, isn't it, that the resurrection is considered the central event of human history, yet we don't even know when it was. We think 27-33AD.

The Gospels

The Gospels were written in the ancient 'bios' genre. Plutarch's Lives is an example. Their subject was key events about a person or teaching, not a history or a biography. It is likely they were written after most or all of the epistles and the events in Acts. The authors are best described by their role as evangelists. They believe in something, and are writing to convey and promote that belief. They were advertising their religion. We err if we try to interpret them as journalism.

These documents were not called gospels until the middle of the second century. (Miller p. 1) They are Jewish literature, set to the backdrop of Jewish beliefs, customs, style, and practices of the time. Ignoring that invites misunderstanding. There is peer literature, and a body of recent literature, to compare. The primary means to communicate ideas was with stories. It wasn't of primary importance whether a story was true. It is difficult or impossible to tell just from a written record of a story whether it was true. A parable is not always introduced as a parable. See Michael Grant, p. 38. "The purpose of the parables in the Gospels and in rabbinic literature was to instruct. Jesus' parables illustrate and teach, despite the argument of a number of scholars that they were designed to conceal his message from the people." (Young, Parables, p. 33) I view them as directly parallel to the illustrations and stories of today's preachers. "First and foremost, both the parables of Jesus and the parables of the rabbis must be studied as Jewish haggadah." (Young, Parables, p. 7)

Names and dates weren't important in this genre. They aren't called histories or objective biographies. There was no psychological sense of formative influences on a person. They show the key events of a person's life to show what he/she was really like. Childhood was shown to demonstrate how the character a person already had, was manifested early in life. The Bible gospels have an unusual emphasis on the death and resurrection of the main character. They have been described as passion (from Greek pasco, to suffer) narratives with long introductions. The gospels give few words to the suffering and execution. (Ehrman audiobook, History of the Bible)

"So the Gospels were not descriptions of what happened or what Jesus said or did; they were interpretations of who Jesus was based on their ancient and sacred heritage." (Spong, p. 20)

"Disconcertingly, we do now know who any of the authors of the four Gospels were. The traditions that they were written by Jesus' apostles Matthew and John, and Paul's companions Mark (John Mark) and Luke, are in each case subject to grave and virtually insuperable doubts." (Grant p. 180)

"So the Gospels were all written between thirty-five and seventy years after Jesus' death. But several further generations passed before they were at all widely accepted. At and after the turn of the century, the later books of the New Testament and then the early Fathers of the Church show remarkably little reflection of Gospel material. Indeed, the earliest-known author to name all four evangelists, Irenaeus, lived nearly a hundred years after they were written." (Grant, p. 189)

“The Jewish Christians began to build anthologies by which they identified the shadows of Jesus everywhere in the ancient sacred story of the Jews. In them these anthologies were employed by the compilers of the post-70 Gospels writers – Matthew, Luke, and John – when the oral traditions of their faith communities were transformed into written documents through which the Jesus story could be heard on a regular basis. We see these Jesus stories following in their written forms the liturgical tradition of the synagogues in which surely the Jesus story was first preached. We discover now and again the license that every preacher takes in the way the stories of the past were used to shape the stories of Jesus. Their concern was to show how Jesus was foreshadowed in the Jewish scriptures of yesterday and, indeed, how the life of Jesus was illumined by those scriptures. So echoes from the heroes of the Jewish past were woven, orally at first, into the story of Jesus. It was not dishonest. It was the ancient tradition of the Jews being employed by the Christians, most of whom were still Jews, to tell their story of Jesus.” (Spong p. 51)

All are anonymous, all written in the third person. Even Matthew doesn't identify Matthew as the author. The titles, added later, are written in a way that shows they aren't claiming legitimate authorship, as the gospel according to Matthew. An author wouldn't call it that. The naming was second-century tradition, aiming to impute apostolic authority to the works. [I call this an ex post facto application of pseudonymity, an attempt to raise the credibility of the anonymous author by crediting it to a respected authority.] The authors were highly educated and literate Christians of at least the second generation. At the best of those times in the ancient Roman world, only 10-15% were literate. Of those, most could write just enough to sign their name. Jesus' followers were peasants from Galilee. They couldn't afford the time or leisure to get an education or learn another language. Since they're not eyewitness accounts, where did they get their information? They would be based on circulating oral traditions of the intervening decades (30-35 years). Christianity was spreading (not as a flood with huge numbers). People were trying to convert polytheists to worship the one God of Israel and His Son Jesus who died for their sins. They had to tell stories about Jesus. Conversions were a chain reaction, with the stories told down the chain. Have you ever played the gossip game of telephone? Try the game for decades among people of differing languages and cultures. And these are stories told with the purpose of conversion, not for historical accuracy. Cultural anthropologists show oral societies don't have concern for verbatim accuracy, as for written cultures, where you can check accuracy. Oral societies tell a story for an occasion. This is well documented in Christian stories. (Ehrman audiobook, History of the Bible)

We have no indication whatever that Jesus ever wrote anything. We have no direct written

record of anything Jesus said. We can't even say with any certainty that any such writings ever existed. Scholars discuss the possibilities of collections of "Sayings of Jesus" but can't find evidence for them. If they were written, why weren't they considered worthy of preservation? It has been suggested that they were already convinced the end of the world was at hand.

Another possibility arises from how Jewish thought and tradition viewed their *torot* (laws). They (of the Pharisees, not the Sadducees) interpret Leviticus 26:46 as saying that "God gave two Laws at Mount Sinai – one in writing, and one by word of mouth. As we have seen, the aim of the Oral Torah is to interpret and help implement the Written Torah. In Jewish tradition, the Bible is called *Mikra*, meaning 'that which is read.' The Mishnah was memorized and repeated in antiquity because the sages transmitted it orally from one generation to the next. Jewish tradition discouraged the writing down of the oral law in order to maintain a distinction between *Mikra* and Mishnah." (Young, Meet the Rabbis, p. 81). They stayed unwritten until Rabbi Judah HaHasi compiled and edited them around 220AD, to establish a standard canon. The teaching that Jesus was doing was Mishnah, oral interpretation of the written law. It would seem to make sense that it wasn't written down. "Thus, the traditional Jewish view traces the Oral Torah back to Mount Sinai. The monumental importance of this view for a correct understanding of Judaism and the beginnings of Christianity cannot be overemphasized. (Young, Meet the Rabbis, p. 197) In Matt 23:3, Jesus clearly indicated his support for oral Torah. (Bivin, New Light, p. 44)

Philosophical Background

The major theme of the teachings of Christ (and therefore the Gospels) was repentance (*matanoia*). This was a common rabbinic theme of the day, but came most directly from John the Baptist, who preached it around AD27-29 as the only remedy for sin. This is consistent with long-standing themes in Jewish thought. John practiced ritual baptism, and probably observed that in the nearby Qumran settlement. John's baptisms differed from those of Qumran: he baptized others rather than himself. The most dramatic innovation was baptism as a single, unique act, rather than a repeated one. It was predicated on repentance. No efficacy was claimed apart from repentance (unlike similar Palestinian and Syrian rites). John also explicitly associated baptism with the Kingdom of God. John claimed merely to be preparing the way, whereas Jesus claimed to be actually ushering in the Kingdom of God. See Michael Grant, p. 45ff. At least that's the story according to the followers of Jesus. I don't think we have John's side of the story. But Matthew 14 tells us that John still had disciples, even after Jesus' ministry was well under way.

Baptism was also an echo of other Jewish rites of purification (e.g. of utensils), and could reasonably be considered ceremonial. There's also a resemblance to the Jewish Mikvah (from Wikipedia):

In the [Jewish Bible](#) and other Jewish texts, immersion in water for ritual purification was established for restoration to a condition of "ritual purity" in specific circumstances. For example, [Jews](#) who (according to the [Law of Moses](#)) became ritually defiled by contact with a corpse had to use the [mikvah](#) before being allowed to participate in the Holy Temple. Immersion is required for [converts to Judaism](#) as part of their conversion. Immersion in the mikvah

represents a change in status in regards to purification, restoration, and qualification for full religious participation in the life of the community, ensuring that the cleansed person will not impose uncleanness on property or its owners Num. 19 and [Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Chagigah](#), p. 12). This change of status by the mikvah could be obtained repeatedly, while Christian baptism, like [circumcision](#), is, in the general view of Christians, unique and not repeatable.

Jesus emphasized that forgiveness immediately follows repentance. Perhaps that was a new emphasis, but not a new thought. Completely new was the claim that he, himself, could forgive sins. That was ‘perhaps the first irremovable wedge, between himself and his fellow-Jews.’ See Michael Grant, p. 50. But did Jesus actually claim that he was forgiving sins? Or was he simply stating that one who repents immediately receives forgiveness from God? That’s what modern Christian evangelists do when they proclaim that a person is saved on the basis of their profession of faith.

In John 1:35, it looks like Jesus ‘stole’ some of the disciples of John the Baptist. It is likely that many, if not all, of Jesus’ disciples started out as disciples of John. More likely would have joined Jesus after the imprisonment and execution of John. The replacement of Judas in Acts 1 hints that all 12 were at least witnesses to John’s baptism of Jesus. (Diaries p. 154)

The Hedge of Hillel

Among the Halakhah laws of Judaism is the *gezeirah*. This is a rabbinic ruling designed to help prevent accidental violation of Torah. From Mishna, Abot 1.1, on Tradition of the Elders:

Moses received the Torah from Sinai and committed it to Joshua, and Joshua to the elders and the elders to the prophets; and the prophets committed it to the men of the Great Congregation. These said three things:

"Be deliberate in judgment";

"Raise up many disciples"; and

"Make a hedge for the Torah."

“The interpretations placed a hedge or fence around the law, on the principle that if one does not break through the fence then he will not be able to break the law itself.” (Ferguson p. 542)

The Great Congregation (Great Assembly, Great Synagogue) was an assembly of 120 scribes, sages, and prophets, from the end of the Biblical prophets for about two centuries to AD 70. To them is attributed the fixing of the Jewish Biblical canon.

Theodicy

Ah, the problem of good and evil. Why do the evil prosper while the righteous suffer? In the original covenants, God promised this would not happen. But people observed it happening. The Psalms have laments over this, and pleadings with God to fix the problem. The prophetic worldview began to explain this as the cosmic conflict between the forces of good and evil. The apocalyptic worldview carried this farther, proclaiming that 'in the end', evil will be punished and good rewarded. The Greek/Roman world of the first century viewed all existence as

encompassed within three domains: earth, the heavenlies, and the depths. Much apocalyptic literature did not specify where the final reckoning would occur. Some, such as the book of Revelation, show the evil, collected from wherever else they might be, and transferred to the depths, the domain of darkness, the lake of fire. The good, also collected, are transferred to the heavenlies. Those who hold a doctrine of bodily resurrection would not be in this camp. Instead, they would write (or interpret) apocalyptic literature as requiring the final judgment to happen on earth. Revelation can be interpreted to show both. Perhaps it tried to appeal to both camps.

Approaching the Text

People wrote what they believed to be true, using language their peers and direct audience would understand. Every written text is a collection of words chosen by an author to express an idea to an audience. Writing can be very compact when it uses economy of expression. If I just say Noah, you know exactly what I mean, and I brought that idea into the forefront of your mind with a single word. If I do the same with Harry Potter, you get the same economy of expression, but only for an audience familiar with Harry Potter.

When a first-century rabbi used the words bind and loose, everyone knew exactly what they meant, and knew exactly the idea being expressed. If you read those words today and want to understand the idea being expressed, you must understand what those words meant to the author and their audience. The alternative, the method nearly always practiced today, is to make up your own meaning, or to quote an 'expert' who made up their own meaning.

Christian Fundamentalism

The basic tenets of Christian Fundamentalism, to me, are:

1. One can understand the meaning of Bible texts simply by reading them. For some, reading English translations is adequate. For others, even a paraphrase is adequate. In a paraphrase, someone reads a text (and/or a translation of a text) and forms an interpretation of that text. They then express that interpretation in modern language, sometimes using modern idioms.
2. The Bible has a mystical origin. Various doctrines of 'inspiration' assert that the writers of the text were coerced, in some manner, and to some degree, to write what God revealed directly to them. A corollary of this is that the selection of writings for the Canon of Scripture (the set of writings chosen by committee to comprise our Bible) was similarly inspired or coerced.

These doctrines drive their holders' interpretation of the texts.

A more plausible view of inspiration, with much better textual support, is that a prophet was inspired, rather than any writing of his words. That better fits an OT view, especially for the history of Israel before they had or used writing.

Textual Criticism

The Gospels, by Frank Nemecek, page 13

Don Flood taught our Sunday School class four steps to Biblical exegesis:

1. What does it say?
2. What did it mean then?
3. What does it mean now?
4. How do I apply it?

The first step aims to keep us true to the original texts, in the original languages, to the best of our ability. It helps protect us from bias and artifacts of translation, paraphrase, and interpretation. The second gives primary emphasis to what the words would have meant to their intended audience. That would include what the audience knows about the writers and their writing style and background. The third gives us tools to distinguish cultural relativities from moral requirements, such as whether your head is covered in church, or perhaps even who is permitted to speak in church and how. The fourth is obvious, and is the focus of modern preaching, to the neglect of the other three.

The relatively modern discipline of textual criticism focuses on step two. The Jesus Seminar might be described as taking this approach to unbridled extremes. My intent would be textual criticism as a tool to help understand what the early writings about Jesus tell us about truth. If textual criticism can lead to an extreme, so can entirely ignoring the context of those writings. In my personal opinion, it is folly to presume that a modern reader can read and understand this ancient literature independent of, and ignorant of, its literary peers and heritage, and the history, culture, and practices of its people. To do so practically guarantees bizarre interpretations based on misunderstandings of what the authors are saying. Spong agrees with me. (Spong, p. 29) Furthermore, the vast majority of the texts we have today (sacred and secular) was discovered in my lifetime. To ignore this resource is, at best, to put our heads in the sand.

Spong goes further to show how Christian negativity toward things Jewish warps their usage and interpretation of the Old Testament. “The primary value of the Hebrew sacred story has had for most Christians lies in the prejudiced assumption that the meaning of the Old Testament is exhausted once its task of pointing to and being fulfilled by the New Testament has been accomplished. The prophets were thought to be something like fortune-tellers who served as the divine predictors of future events. His example is using Gen 3:15 as a prophecy of the atonement.

I applaud the conservative Christian community for its prioritization of Scripture above that of commentaries about Scripture. Yet I decry its relative unwillingness to try to actually understand those texts in the context of the intellectual backdrop against which they were written, and the unwillingness to set aside ancient traditions about who wrote what in favor of actually trying to figure out, to the best of available resources, who could or could not have been the author.

The philosophy that seems to govern Bible study, even in Conservative and Fundamentalist circles, is Deconstructionism. In effect, it dismisses from serious concern what the author intended for a text, and instead favors “What does this text say to you?”.

Eisegesis vs. Exegesis

First I'll quote definitions given by Paul Alden on a Facebook post. I'll cite a better reference when I find one.

Exegesis (from the Greek ἐξηγεῖσθαι 'to lead out') is a critical explanation or interpretation of a text, especially a religious text. Traditionally the term was used primarily for exegesis of the Bible; however, in contemporary usage it has broadened to mean a critical explanation of any text, and the term Biblical exegesis is used for greater specificity. The goal of Biblical exegesis is to explore the meaning of the text which then leads to discovering its significance or relevance.

Exegesis includes a wide range of critical disciplines: textual criticism is the investigation into the history and origins of the text, but exegesis may include the study of the historical and cultural backgrounds for the author, the text, and the original audience. Other analysis includes classification of the type of literary genres present in the text, and an analysis of grammatical and syntactical features in the text itself.

The terms exegesis and hermeneutics have been used interchangeably. However, hermeneutics is a more widely-defined discipline of interpretation theory: hermeneutics includes the entire framework of the interpretive process, encompassing all forms of communication: written, verbal and nonverbal, while exegesis focuses primarily on the written text.

Eisegesis (from Greek εἰς "into" and ending from exegesis from ἐξηγεῖσθαι "to lead out") is the process of misinterpreting a text in such a way that it introduces one's own ideas, reading into the text. This is best understood when contrasted with exegesis. While exegesis draws out the meaning from the text, eisegesis occurs when a reader reads his/her interpretation into the text. As a result, exegesis tends to be objective when employed effectively while eisegesis is regarded as highly subjective. An individual who practices eisegesis is known as an eisegete, as someone who practices exegesis is known as an exegete. The term eisegete is often used in a mildly derogatory fashion.

I find that eisegesis dominates exegesis when Christians (including Christian theologians) interpret Tanakh (Old Testament). When this practice is combined with obstinate refusal to use other methods of understanding ancient texts, misinterpretations unrelated to any thought or intent of the writer are guaranteed. Other methods include studying thoughts and writings of others of the era, and of geographic and philosophic neighbors of the authors. I consider this the primary cause of bad doctrine. A colorful description of this practice, "they [Gnostics and Manichaeans] came, not to learn its language, but to see if they could not compel it to speak theirs; with no desire to draw out of Scripture its meaning, but only to thrust into Scripture their own." , from (Trench, p. 42).

Lectionary Theory of Gospel Formation

With his prophecy class, Ken Gilbert gave me a key which unlocked a lot of the mystery of Biblical prophetic writing. It doesn't make sense until you learn the language of prophecy and what it means. A major clue to that was to use our knowledge about prophecies already fulfilled to understand the language of the predictions of those events. The sun didn't really turn into blood. The stars didn't really fall out of the skies. Further, Revelation becomes clearer when you recognize that it is, in all important stylistic respects, an Old Testament book, and primarily (if not exclusively) about Israel. For more detail, see my companion work on Revelation.

Now look at the time of the early church. It was still mainly a Jewish phenomenon, mainly

The Gospels, by Frank Nemecek, page 15

composed of Jews. Their background, knowledge, and worship experience were all Jewish. Further, it wasn't just the experience of the Old Testament, it was the experience of Jews of post-30AD.

I strongly encourage all to read John Shelby Spong's book, Liberating the Gospels: Reading the Bible with Jewish Eyes, available from the Santa Clara County public library system. You may also borrow my copy. I don't ask you to believe everything he says. But I do ask you to consider his primary thesis about why and how the gospels were written.

Jewish worship at the time was centered around the scheduled reading of the Pentateuch (Torah) over the course of the liturgical year. Its organization was centered around the key festivals, feasts, and holy days of Israel:

1. Passover
2. Pentecost
3. Ninth of Ab
4. New Year (Rosh Hashanah)
5. Atonement (Yom Kippur)
6. Tabernacles
7. Dedication (Hanukkah)
8. Purim

Spong (p. 76) also notes that one of the earliest manuscripts of Mark, Codex Alexandrinus, is specifically divided into 49 separate lections for use in worship. The gospels seem to be written as a guide to how this new Christian community can adapt its familiar structure for the worship of God to the new knowledge about Jesus. "... the oral traditions of their faith communities were transformed into written documents through which the Jesus story could be heard on a regular basis." This happened 35-70 years after Jesus' earthly life was over.

Further, the style is midrashic, showing who Jesus was not by the later historic or documentary process of relating accurate details and events, but by telling stories which show Jesus by comparison with themes with which they are all already familiar. "So the Gospels were not descriptions of what happened or what Jesus said or did, they were interpretations of who Jesus was based on their ancient and sacred heritage." (Spong p. 20) Spong covers this in great detail with abundant examples.

This would also explain why the earliest Christians believed that everything which had been written about the Christ had already been completely fulfilled in Jesus.

To succeed, an attempt to 'harmonize' the gospels must do so around the themes of the traditional practices of Jewish worship, the themes of the holy days and the teaching path through the Pentateuch (Torah). For a fairly exhaustive analysis of this, see Michael Goulder's The Evangelist's Calendar. In my view, the gospels were not written to be harmonized, and that

especially with an attempted alignment to historical chronology.

Mark

This first gospel covers that portion of the liturgical year most important, and most unique to Christianity, the Passion of Christ. "... neither biography nor history so much as it is a corporate memory" (Spong p. 86)

If the author was Mark, a 'disciple' of Peter, one would expect him to emphasize what Peter emphasized. Mark's gospel would also be viewed as carrying Peter's authority, and would certainly be promoted in Peter's domain or sphere of influence. It would also have been the first distributed. See Thiede p. 52.

The document itself never mentions its author, nor the place, time, or circumstances of its origin. Scholars estimate 66-70AD, perhaps in Greek-speaking Syria. This was after Paul's death in 64AD. The tradition of authorship by "Mark" grew some time in the second century. ... The Greek prose employed is the informal language of ordinary men and women who made up the common eastern Mediterranean culture in the first century. (Miller, p. 10-11) Many date it after 70AD.

Mark 1:14 – Starting with John the Baptist and continuing with Jesus, an apocalyptic judgment was imminent (at hand). Evil would be punished, Rome would be evicted, and a nation of Israel would be restored. You should change your behavior now (repent), so you'll be on the good side of that judgment. You should also repent so that God can resume blessing you by giving you back your political independence. Preaching the gospel meant proclaiming that message.

Mark 1:23 – Demon possession isn't found in the Old Testament. (Diaries) The modern term that seems to be the closest linguistically is pathogen. (Diaries p. 141)

Mark 8:33 A common epithet hurled by members of one group against another (Pharisaic, prophetic, rabbinic) was "firstborn of Satan" or "synagogue of Satan". (Moseley p. 146)

Mark 13 "The fervency and specificity of these passages [Mark 13] suggest that the author was writing for readers who knew such experiences, either directly or indirectly, and were in danger of facing similar sufferings in their immediate future. This means the narratives of Jesus' arrest and trials would have been intended to have a practical, existential force and would have been read accordingly." (Hurtado, p. 164)

Matthew

Early church tradition refers to the apostle Matthew as the author. It is written in good Koine Greek of the period. No clue remains to tell us whether it was originally written in another language like Aramaic or Hebrew (but see Bivin and Blizzard). Authorship is referred to as Matthew, by convention. (Miller, p. 56)

It is targeted to a Jewish audience, probably those who fled Jerusalem before or during the slaughter of AD70, and settled in the upper Galilee/lower Syria area. A new rabbinic tradition was developing here, starting what is now rabbinic Judaism. But Matthew's Jewish Christian community felt threatened by these changes. The account has the strongest ties to Torah content, teaching, story, and structure. The scathing rebukes of the Pharisees are those of this community, not those of Jesus' time. Jesus fit right in with the Pharisees. His teachings matched theirs.

Matthew is organized into five teaching blocks, each closing with the phrase "when Jesus had finished." The blocks are organized by Jewish festival (Spong p. 91) Perhaps he wanted this text viewed as the "Christian Torah," but that doesn't help understand the organization. The scholars' best guess is 80-82AD for its writing. (Spong p. 102) Ancient manuscripts such as the Codex Alexandrinus divided the text into a preface (chapter 1) followed by 68 units. This likely reflected an even earlier tradition. The recent discovery of the Magdalen Papyrus by Thiede offers some evidence of an earlier date, perhaps before 70AD. Keep an eye out for scrolls to be discovered during the continuing excavations at Herculaneum. Also watch for more to be learned from the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Nag Hammadi library. Of greatest value to study of Christian documents would be the newest Greek and Roman documents in the caves, as well the newest copies of Jewish documents in the caves. Since these documents could be no newer than the 68AD date of the abandonment of the caves, they could be very helpful in establishing dates for Christian documents found elsewhere. See Thiede, p. 110. The language of the parable of the banquet in 22:7 seems to be describing the destruction of Jerusalem as a past event, leading most to consider the writing as after 70AD. (Miller, p. 57, see also the argument there that Matthew represents a debate, not between Jew and Gentile or Christian, but between rival sects of rabbinic Judaism, Pharisaic vs. John the Baptist, then Jesus, then the Matthean community)

If the author is indeed the disciple Matthew, his day job was probably more like a customs officer, assessing and collecting taxes on the goods passing through the trade routes. He would have been in a high economic class, and respected professionally, though still not liked by those who had to pay tax. Matthew probably held the religious office of provincial scribe. He led the synagogue as *sophar* (worship leader), and served as the provincial schoolmaster for Jewish children in his Syrian town (Spong, p. 102). His task in the synagogue was to teach the scriptures to adults who gathered for worship, relating one text to another in *midrashic* fashion. Matthew incorporated 606 of the 664 verses of Mark into his own work. But Mark covered just 6.5 months of the liturgical year, so Matthew needed to provide quite a bit of material of his own to cover the rest of the year. Some say he used the proposed 'Q' text as a source, but if there was a Q, there doesn't seem to be evidence that Matthew didn't write it. These proposed 'Q' documents, the *Loqienquelle*, are more of a generic name for collected sayings of Jesus

Matthew could have overtaken Mark in popularity, since it was broader in scope, used more action and a more exciting writing style, and included more content like the sermon on the mount. See Thiede, p. 52. It also covered more of the liturgical year, as mentioned above.

Sermon on the Mount – (Spong p. 114) explains the sermon on the mount as patterned after the

Jewish celebration of Pentecost, organized as a 24-hour watch vigil. Each beatitude states a theme. Each of the 8 watches of the vigil centers on the theme of the corresponding beatitude, last to first, in a typical Jewish pattern. Read it, I won't retype it. It revealed Jesus as "the new Moses presiding at the new Sinai".

"There is no mention of what to believe in the Sermon on the Mount. The focus rather is on action: what to do and thereby fulfill the meaning of Torah." (Young, Meet the Rabbis, p. 204)

Matt 1:23 "... the word 'virgin' does not appear in the original Hebrew passage in Isaiah. It is simply not there! Matthew has developed an idea based on a concept that was not present in the original source Matthew was quoting. The word 'virgin' did not enter the Book of Isaiah until it was translated into Greek some 500 years after Isaiah had written these words and some 200 years before the birth of Jesus." (Spong p. 188, with further explanations)

Matt 2:15 – Hosea was not prophesying this. It barely qualifies as a type. It seems that Matthew shouldn't be citing this as fulfillment of a detailed prophecy.

Matt 2:16 – There is no historical evidence for the slaughter of the innocents, though there is quite a bit of historical information about Herod.

Matthew 5:3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." but Luke 6:20, "And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said, Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God."

From The Eight Beatitudes - Catholic Encyclopedia, see <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02371a.htm>.

The word poor seems to represent an Aramaic 'ányâ (Hebrew 'anî), bent down, afflicted, miserable, poor; while meek is rather a synonym from the same root, 'ánwan (Hebrew 'ánaw), bending oneself down, humble, meek, gentle. Some scholars would attach to the former word also the sense of humility; others think of "beggars before God" humbly acknowledging their need of Divine help. But the opposition of "rich" (Luke 6:24) points especially to the common and obvious meaning, which, however, ought not to be confined to economical need and distress, but may comprehend the whole of the painful condition of the poor: their low estate, their social dependence, their defenseless exposure to injustice from the rich and the mighty.

From the Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary, see <http://bible.cc/matthew/5-3.htm>.

3. Blessed are the poor in spirit-All familiar with Old Testament phraseology know how frequently God's true people are styled "the poor" (the "oppressed," "afflicted," "miserable") or "the needy"-or both together (as in Ps 40:17; Isa 41:17). The explanation of this lies in the fact that it is generally "the poor of this world" who are "rich in faith" (Jas 2:5; compare 2Co 6:10; Re 2:9); while it is often "the ungodly" who "prosper in the world" (Ps 73:12). Accordingly, in Lu 6:20, 21, it seems to be this class-the literally "poor" and "hungry"-that are specially addressed.

But since God's people are in so many places styled "the poor" and "the needy," with no evident reference to their temporal circumstances (as in Ps 68:10; 69:29-33; 132:15; Isa 61:1; 66:2), it is plainly a frame of mind which those terms are meant to express. Accordingly, our translators sometimes render such words "the humble" (Ps 10:12, 17), "the meek" (Ps 22:26), "the lowly" (Pr 3:34), as having no reference to outward circumstances. But here the explanatory words, "in spirit," fix the sense to "those who in their deepest consciousness realize their entire need" (compare the Greek of Luke 10:21; John 11:33; 13:21; Acts 20:22; Romans 12:11; 1 Corinthians 5:3; Philippians 3:3). This self-emptying conviction, that "before God we are void of everything," lies at the foundation of all spiritual excellence, according to the teaching of Scripture. Without it we are inaccessible to the riches of Christ; with it we are in the fitting state for receiving all spiritual supplies (Re 3:17, 18; Mt 9:12, 13).

From <http://sce.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/22/3/261>

In his study on the Sermon on the Mount, Hans Dieter Betz remarks that the expression 'the poor in spirit' (Mt. 5:3) is unique in the entire New Testament and does not appear at all in the early Christian literature or elsewhere in the Greek language.

Luke 6:20 has just "Blessed are ye poor." (Luke 6:24) But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation." The most likely explanation, and the most plausible, is a scribal change. At the very least, we must admit we don't understand what is being said. Humility or self-abjection is out of context here.

Jesus appealed to the poor, and elevated them above others. Matt 6:1-4 give to the needy. Matt 6:18 treasures in heaven. Matt 6:25-34 do not be anxious - life, food, drink, clothing. Matt 19:16-30 rich man, sell and give to the poor, easier for camel ... Another reason for this was the continuing conflict between the schools of Hillel and Shammai. Relevant to this is the fact that the Shammai were considered the mouthpiece of the wealthy Pharisees. (Moseley p. 147)

Matt 5:3 "theirs is the kingdom of heaven" It doesn't belong to them. The Beatitudes are a characterization or description of those in the kingdom. (Bivin)

Matthew 5:9 "Blessed are the peacemakers."

These were people who encouraged resolution of conflicts by nonviolent means. Today, on a grand scale, it's the likes of Jimmy Carter and Henry Kissinger.

Perhaps David's greatest accomplishment was unifying a dozen semitic tribes, who probably warred with their neighbors just like all the other semitic tribes, into a nation unified by a strong military/political leader (David) and a religion (Judaism).

These people were not monotheistic. Judaism fought a constant battle for supremacy.

The most powerful factor for progress throughout history was the ability to resolve conflict by

nonviolent means. The united tribes of Israel could spend more of their efforts on literary, intellectual, and economic endeavors.

Today's peacemakers help marriages and families to develop healthy relationships and resolve conflict in meaningful, unifying ways.

At Valley I attended the film and theology class, and excellent class and experience. I began the class as the only non-Asian. But among other things, it was a step toward integrating a cultural subculture and the greater Valley community.

It's easy to be offended or threatened by the influx of the Asian hordes, taking over our communities, now the majority population in Cupertino, Saratoga, and others. But they make very good citizens. They behave, they are well educated and work hard, and they meld into American society more than some other immigrant populations such as Hispanic. It becomes unthinkable to again go to war with such a kindred society. Think of Germany. Today, the only way you can tell a person is of German descent is to ask them.

Look around these related references:

From The Eight Beatitudes - Catholic Encyclopedia, see <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02371a.htm>.

From the Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary, see <http://bible.cc/matthew/5-3.htm>.

From <http://sce.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/22/3/261>

Matt 5:17-18 "Destroy" and "fulfill" are technical terms used in rabbinic argumentation. When a sage felt that a colleague had misinterpreted a passage of Scripture, he would say, "You are destroying the Law!" ... What was "destroying the law" for one sage, was "fulfilling the Law" (correctly interpreting Scripture) for another.' (Bivin p. 114) Moseley (p. 64-65) elaborates:

Fourth-Century Theology

It is obvious that neither Jesus nor Paul ever renounced Judaism, deviated from the Jewish faith, or attempted to start a new religion. At this point, a major question needs to be answered. If Jesus and Paul did not form a new anti-Jewish religion, who did?

A quick look at church history shows that as the church moved westward and away from its Jewish roots, the Roman church leaders of the fourth century developed theologies which virtually did away with all that was Jewish. The most fundamental change was the teaching that the Law was evil and stood in opposition to the grace of God.

By the fourth century, the Roman church had changed the church's fundamental teaching

of keeping the Law to a religion whose message avoided anything having to do with the term. Pseudo-Christian writers taught that the Law of Moses had been fulfilled by the coming of Christ, but they redefined the word "fulfilled" to mean abolished or canceled, which was the exact opposite of its true meaning as used by Christ (Matthew 5:18-19). To Jesus, as in the rabbinic literature of his day, to "fulfill" the Law meant to keep the Law and correctly interpret its teachings. We can see from Paul's writings that he also understood the phrase "fulfill the Law" to mean that the Law is only fulfilled through love for God and our fellow man (see Galatians 6:2 and Romans 13:10).

The new ideas opposing Law in Christianity began to spring up as early as A.D. 160-220 in the Roman African communities represented by Tertullian, and were spearheaded by popular speakers such as Bishop John Chrysostom in Antioch (A.D. 349-400). From the mid-second century through the seventh century, Roman theologians developed doctrine upon doctrine in opposition to authentic biblical teachings. Origen, for example, a third-century Christian philosopher, took Paul's phrase "the letter of the Law," and developed a completely new teaching on legalism. By suggesting a dichotomy between "the letter" and "the spirit," he set the stage for the term "legalism" to become synonymous with Judaism, both of which he condemned.

Paul's use of the phrase "letter of the Law" was solely against Judaizers who misused the Law, claiming it was the means of salvation even for Gentiles. He never criticized the Law of God as being legalistic. In fact, it was Paul who argued that before the Law death reigned and that the Law has dominion over believers while they live, because the Law is holy, just, good, and spiritual (see Romans 5:14 and 7:1-25). He insisted that the Law of God is the will of God, and that if we believe it, God will write it on our hearts, and it will be manifested in our lives (see Romans 2:17-18 and 20-29).

Matt 5:19 is better expressed as, "Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." (Young, Meet the Rabbis, p. 45)

Matt 5:20 unless your alms-giving exceeds that of the scribes ... (Bivin) who also says "If your righteousness is reduced to almsgiving, Jesus admonished, you will not be in my movement, the Kingdom of Heaven." (Bivin p. 111)

Matt 5:29-30 Hyperbole to emphasize the seriousness of sin.

Matt 5:39 "do not resist evil" means don't compete with evil-doers. Don't take revenge, even if you are entitled to it. Ps 37:1,8 and Proverbs 24:19. Matt 5:42 continues the theme: don't exact revenge on your neighbor with whom you have a quarrel by refusing to lend to him. Matt 5:10 Blessed are those who are pursued (not persecuted) because they are godly. v. 11-12 are about persecution, but the pronouns also change. (Bivin)

Matt 6:9-13 (the Lord's Prayer) In response to the disciples' request to teach them to pray, Jesus recites the Jewish Aveinu, see <http://jerusalemcouncil.org/halacha/tefillah/aveinu-our-father-lords-prayer/>. Acts 2:42 states, "And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in the prayers." Those prayers were the Amidah, prayed three times daily, followed by the Aveinu. That source suggests the disciples were asking him what he prayed after the Amidah. The words sound familiar (Didache 8:2-3):

*Likewise, don't pray as the hypocrites, but as commanded in the Gospel in this manner:
Our Father in heaven,
Sacred is Your Name.
Your kingdom comes.
Your will is accomplished,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us each day our daily bread,
and forgive us our debt
in the manner that we forgive our debtors.
And do not allow us to fall to temptation,
but deliver us from evil,
for Yours is the power and the glory forever.
Amen!*

Matt 7:1-6 most likely revisits the bind/loose paradigm. I am not to criticize another Jew for doing the questionable thing that my rabbi binds, but theirs looses. The idea of the hedge did not require adoption of the union of all prohibitions. It inhibited the unbounded escalation of prohibitions. Verse 6 continues the subject. Dogs and pigs were considered unclean animals. A Jew who chooses to stay unclean demonstrates a disregard for Torah. Don't bother trying to teach them, they don't want to learn. It's reminiscent of the Proverb teaching not to bother correcting a fool, and also of the request in the Lord's Prayer to forgive me as I forgive others.

Matt 7:7-11 The ask-seek-knock passage teaches the same message as the persistent widow, see Luke 18.

Matt 7:12 The Golden Rule, see note on Matt 22:36.

Matt 7:15 Beware of false prophets. Hey, what was that about not judging? Only 15 verses away is good evidence that "judge not" is not an admonition against discernment. Jesus adds further warning in the Olivet Discourse in Matt 24.

Matt 9:11 – The use of 'sinners' implies not everyone was a 'sinner'. The term was used as a pejorative for a Jew not living under the Mosaic Law. Thus in this context at least, Jesus was likely using the term as it would be used by the Pharisees who were challenging Him.

Matt 9:20-21 "And behold, a woman which was diseased with an issue of blood twelve years came behind him and touched the hem of his garment: For she said within herself, If I may but

touch his garment, I shall be whole.” On the hem of the garment would have been the *tzitzit*, the tassels of Numbers 15:37-41 and Deuteronomy 22:12. In Numbers, the word translated border or corner is also often translated wings. During the first century, one tradition about this *tzitzit* was that these knotted fringes possessed healing powers. This probably came from Malachi 4:2, which speaks of Messiah coming “with healing in His wings.” (Moseley p. 22)

Matt 10:16-40 These sayings about persecution reflect the experiences early Christians were having when the texts were written. They were persecuted by the traditional polytheists because they refused to offer sacrifices to the traditional gods. (Hurtado p. 60-62)

Matt 11:7 and Luke 7:24 Jesus alludes to the fable of “The Oak and The Reed”. The politicians who inhabit kings' palaces bend with the wind, surviving the political storms. John the Baptist, unwilling to compromise his message, broke with the wind. For a discussion of this with references, see (Young, Parables, p. 20)

Matt 11:12(?) is a rabbinic (midrash) interpretation of Micah 2:12-13. The sheep have been penned up all night for protection. The breach-maker opens up the wall and the sheep are anxious to get out. The king (Messiah) leads them out. (Bivin)

Matt 11:28-30 The task of the rabbi was the learning and teaching of Torah. To share that task, to pull the same load as your teacher, is to take his yoke upon you. It wasn't considered negative, or a 'burden' as we use the word. The same theme is seen in Ben Sira 51, written over a century before Jesus. (Bivin, New Light, p. 23ff) According to Ben Sira, it's Wisdom who invited people to her, to find rest, and accept her yoke (op cit, p. 28)

Matt 13:1-9, 18-23 parable of the sower. This parable, and the one following, are the kind any rabbi of the Pharisees would use when talking about the value of studying Torah.

Matt 13:24-30, 36-43 parable of the tares. It's a reference to all the apocalyptic literature. More specifically, it's saying that, even though 'in the end', the good are rewarded and the evil punished, we can't tell now which is which. It makes more palatable the idea that we are not responsible for the punishment of the evil ones. It helps preserve a society from endless retaliation for perceived wrongs. Especially, don't use violent means for the suppression of error. Crusaders would have done well to heed this. It's the “causes of sin and all law-breakers” (ESV) who will be cast into the fiery furnace, not those who lack some belief.

When Jesus speaks of the son of man, he is not necessarily saying he is that person. In the OT, a prophet (especially Ezekiel) shows God referring to him (the prophet) as son of man, emphasizing his humanity. Perhaps a modern equivalent would be an advanced intellect of science fiction referring to a person in a condescending way as 'human', or 'carbon unit'. It thus was sometimes used as a way for a prophet to refer to himself.

Matt 13:10-17 The author of Matthew is offering an explanation for why the idea of Jesus as God was unknown during his lifetime. It was intentionally kept a secret. Parables were a normal and

typical way of teaching for the rabbis. Their purpose was an example from everyday life to illustrate a point, not to hide a meaning.

Matt 13:31-32 parable of the mustard seed. “‘small as a mustard seed’ was a proverbial expression among the Jews for something exceedingly minute.” Don’t let small or humble beginnings fool you. The Kingdom of God will grow.

Matt 13:33 parable of leaven. Leaven need not always symbolize sin. Here, it simply represents something which grows or spreads.

Matt 13:52 “According to a saying attributed to Hillel, anyone who does not add to one’s learning through new and innovative creativity should be killed. One adds to the old as one captures the essence of Torah and passes the message on to subsequent generations.” (Abot 1:13 from Young, Parables, p. 30) I see this as a parallel to modern preaching and authoring.

Matt 14 This account tells us that John the Baptist still had disciples. We never get to hear his side of the story, only what the evangelists for Jesus choose to tell us.

Matt 16:18-19 This is the graduation ceremony of Peter. Jesus was appointing Peter as his apostle, to lead the assembly in the future. It was done in the presence of the other disciples, so they would know who the future leader would be. Bind means to forbid; loose means to permit. Jesus was telling Peter that Peter had the authority to interpret the Law, and that his rulings would be respected in heaven. The apostles did that in regard to big decisions like circumcision, offering meat to idols, etc. This is what rabbis did when they made rulings on what constituted ‘labor’ and therefore was forbidden on the Sabbath. (Bivin) Jesus was passing on rabbinic authority to make rulings. The ceremony included a bit of humor, since Petra usually meant a pebble, whereas rock meant a larger boulder.

Matt 16:20 One of this author’s explanations for why the ideas of Christianity were unknown during the lifetime of Jesus. The disciples were told the secrets, but told not to tell.

Matt 18:12-14 (and Luke 15:3-7) Shepherds would herd their flocks into a protected place in the evening, often a walled pen (see note above for Matt 11:12). The diligent ones would count the flock. If any were missing, they would leave their flock in the protected place (usually in the care of other shepherds) and search for the missing ones. Spiritual leaders were often compared to shepherds. Ezekiel 34 is a challenge to these leaders to do their job. 34:16 speaks of seeking that which was lost. That’s one reason Young, Flusser, Lindsey and others to suggest the context of this parable was Levi’s dinner, and why Luke associated this with the parable of the lost coins. The motivational emphasis of most prophetic writings was to draw a wayward Israel back to the God of Israel, both in worship and in obedience.

Matt 18:21-35 parable of the unmerciful servant. Peter was being magnanimous, offering to forgive seven times. He knew that only three were required, Amos 1:3, 2:6, and Job 33:29,30. (Trench p. 151) The new motif of seventy times seven was practically unlimited. In ancient

societies, revenge was the norm. Judaism tempered the revenge by prohibiting escalation. The eye-for-an-eye was a limitation on revenge. Christianity tempers it even more. This made Christianity very appealing to rulers of empire, who had to always work at reducing violent conflict among parts of an empire. This could have been part of the appeal for Constantine.

Matt 19:9 This is a relatively rare instance where Jesus sides with Beit Shammai, discouraging divorce, whereas Hillel tended to make it easy.

Matt 20:1-16 parable of the laborers. The school of Shammai is jealous of sinners who repent. Why should these latecomers get all the benefits of Judaism, when we dedicated our whole lives to it? This parable is designed to stir up emotions against that jealousy. To resent the happiness of another is an “evil eye”.

Matt 21 The triumphal entry is reminiscent of a custom of the Pharisees for the Feast of Tabernacles (Moseley p. 141)

Matt 21:12-13 The 'cleansing of the temple' act would be considered by the Romans as threatening to their control of the temple. This alone would be suitable cause for executing him.

Matt 22:1-14 the parable of the wedding feast. The language of verse 3 refers to the practice, in Eastern manners, wherein the host sends a servant (a chamberlain) to escort or usher a guest (who was previously invited) to the banquet. For such a guest to refuse to attend at that point would be a serious breach of manners or custom. The offense is the same as in Matt 21:28-32, the parable of the two sons. You said you would, but you didn't. What counts is not what you say you are going to do, but what you actually do.

Matt 22:36-40 the greatest commandment. This is an encapsulation of the essence of Torah. Compare this to the Golden Rule, cited earlier by Hillel, “What you would not have done to thyself do not to another; that is the whole law, the rest is commentary” (BT *Shabbath* 31 a). Akiva ben Joseph, in Genesis Rabbah 24:7, calls this the greatest principle of the Torah. An even earlier expression of this form of reciprocity appears in Leviticus 19:18 and 34, “you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Reciprocity also shows up in the request in the Lord's Prayer to forgive me as I forgive others.

Matt 23 is an introduction to the apocalypse of the next two chapters, and a justification for it. I think this is much more likely to be from early Christianity than from the lifetime of Jesus.

Matt 24-25 the apocalypse of Jesus. It begins with prophetic literature explaining AD70 by way of a prediction/warning. In the battle against Rome, choose your side now, and stick with it. Side with Rome now, and when Rome loses, don't expect to change sides. Rome will lose, but no one knows when.

Matt 25:14-30 parable of the talents. The message is stewardship. “Character is doing what's right when nobody is looking.” (Oklahoma Congressman J. C. Watts, speech at the Republican

National Convention (August 13, 1996) The surprise element is that all the servants had the proper attitude: to please the master. But good intentions are not enough.

Matt 25:29 “This saying is closely related to a Jewish tradition that speaks about the giving of the law. The Torah was freely given by God. In like manner, it is taught freely. The one who learns the most from Torah receives more, while the one who neglects the study of the ways of the Lord will lose what he or she has acquired. The more learning, the more life. The more one has, the more one will receive.” (Young, Parables, p. 85) “Luke’s version of the parable makes subtle allusions to the historical events surrounding Archelaus’ rise to power.” Rewarding the successful administrators with cities probably reflects the kings desire to choose representatives most capable of extracting taxes from the populace. (Young, Parables, p. 86) “In rabbinic thought, either death or the end of the present world may cause the final accounting to determine a person’s reward or punishment (Young, Parables p. 85).

Matt 27:16 Barabbas, a Greek name (bar-abbas) meaning “son of the father”. Appearing in all four gospels, the name would likely have been recognized immediately by Greek-speakers as a literary contrast to Jesus as “Son of the Father”. The chief priests and elders are portrayed as preferring the former over the latter.

Luke

Luke’s community was far more Hellenized and therefore less traditionally Jewish. Luke was probably one of those gentile Christians as well. The Luke of traditional authorship was a ‘disciple’ of Paul, leading expectations of affinity in that direction. He tells how word of Jesus reached the rest of the world. He reflects the continuing drift of that sect of Judaism which followed Jesus, from the rest of Judaism. He portrays Jesus as a scholar (like himself), leading that drift.

Some take the generic nature of the name Theophilus as an indication that the address is to ‘lovers of God’ in general rather than a specific person. Otherwise, this was likely a dedication to a high-ranking Roman civil servant. This dedication would have obliged Theophilus to pay for the copying and distribution of the work. And his office would give him access to the imperial mail, getting the works to anywhere in 3 days to 2 weeks. These factors, along with Paul’s authority, would have helped the wide distribution and popularity of Luke’s gospel. See Thiede, p. 109.

Luke is addressed with an intent to ‘set the record straight’, expressing tactful dissatisfaction with previous narratives about Jesus. In doing so, he acknowledges pre-existing writing. It is the first volume of a set (Luke-Acts). Luke expresses the story with God (rather than Jesus) as the prime mover. He downplays the belief in the imminence of the return of Jesus and the end of the world, viewing the Christian movement as a long-term proposition (“the Way” in Acts). (Miller, p. 116) The set is written in the style of other novelistic literature of the time, “an early Christian romance.” It has the highest literary style of the NT. It addresses whether Christians can be good citizens of the Empire. Thus, Luke is more antagonistic toward Judaism, trending

toward the Roman. (Frontline)

Luke is written in shorter lessons, perhaps to a younger audience (Spong p. 89), and perhaps as a catechism (Spong p. 126) Written 60 years (3 generations) after Jesus' death, "Would anyone dare to pretend that they could recapture the chronological order of the events of Jesus' birth or of his earthly life and ministry from the vantage point of sixty to one hundred years later?" (Spong p. 125) Rather, Luke's account parallels Genesis. (Spong p. 132) Luke 9:19 parallels Numbers 13-15 (sending out the spies), and note that "the names Joshua and Jesus were identical in Hebrew" (Spong p. 154) (FAN note: the Greek writers/translators probably used the Septuagint.) See Spong p. 166 for a mapping of Luke to the Torah in the Jewish liturgical year.

Luke 1 Hannah, the annunciation of Mary: "midrashic interpretations by Jewish people seeking to process their experience of God in Jesus of Nazareth in a traditional Jewish way." (Spong p. 216) The "special baby" motif is definitely reminiscent of Moses. Further, Joseph is reminiscent of the Joseph who saved Israel by bringing them to Egypt. Compare Matthew 2. By the time the gospel narratives were written, probably no one knew (or cared) who Jesus' parents were.

Luke 1:32-33 These words attributed to Gabriel could suitably be said of any king of Israel.

Luke 1:7, 36 Elizabeth and Zechariah sound a whole lot like Abraham and Sarah.

Luke 1:39-45 Gabriel announces the birth of John the Baptist as a prophet, to Zechariah. In verse 43, Elizabeth's exclamation shifts from Mary to herself. I think it is more likely Elizabeth is speaking of herself in verse 45, rather than of Mary. The contrast would be to 1:20, where her husband Zechariah was punished because he did not believe the pronouncement of Gabriel.

By contrast, Mary is told (by the same Gabriel) that her son Jesus (the Greek form of the name Joshua) would fill a messianic role by becoming king of Israel. At the very least, that would mean he was to be a successor of Herod. But in the context of the talk about the Kingdom of God, that would mean Jesus would be king of the newly independent nation of Israel (free from Rome). You can read about that in her Magnificat. It's exactly what she describes, along with the apocalyptic reversal of fortunes. Jesus would lead Israel into their promised land, as his namesake Joshua had done.

Luke 1:46-55 Mary's Magnificat is a Psalm.

Luke 1:63 His name is John (not "Let's name him John.").

Luke 2:11 and John 4:42 – the only places in the gospels where Jesus is referred to as "savior". (MacArthur note to Luke 2:11). This concept seemed hidden during Jesus' ministry.

Luke 2:12 Spong p. 190 explains the manger reference. It's not a stable or animals.

Luke 2:46 Jesus could well have been interacting directly with Hillel the Elder, shortly before his

death around AD 10. If Jesus was not a direct disciple of Hillel, or perhaps Gamaliel his grandson, his teachings still show a very strong influence from Hillel.

Luke 4:16-21 Jesus was formally announcing the beginning of his ministry to the poor (the common people). He is filling a role, not satisfying a prediction.

Luke 5:14 is an explanation for why people hadn't heard of the miracles.

Luke 5:24 is an interpretation by the author.

Luke 5:33-39 old wineskins. This is most often described as a philosophical incompatibility between competing religious idioms, name the old vs. the new covenant. That, of course, would be an anachronism. It's in the greater context of the calling of disciples. The criticisms are of the disciples, not of their teacher. Compare with the Pharisaic proverb of Avot 4:20. The idea seems to be that new teaching requires previously uneducated students in order to be received. That's consistent with the descriptions of the called disciples. There's a good discussion of this at <http://www.bethimmanuel.org/articles/new-wine-and-old-wineskins-parable-luke-536-39-re-examined> . The last verse is an eloquent expression of the fact that people don't change their views.

Luke 6 Here, the Beatitudes are a typical expression of apocalyptic reversal of fortunes.

Luke 7:11-17 raising widow's son. It's Isaiah from 1 Kings 17 all over again. I wrote a note that the Luke passage is almost an exact quote of the Septuagint, but I can't find where it came from.

Luke 7:18-23 Some people expected a messiah to match Isaiah 29. That's why there had to be miracle accounts.

Luke 7:37 As noted elsewhere, sinner meant a non-practicing Jew, not a prostitute.

Luke 7:47 Jesus was telling her that her sins are forgiven. He wasn't claiming to forgive them.

Luke 8 I think it was very unusual for a rabbi to accept women as students. Several gospel accounts show Jesus according women a status higher than typical for earlier tradition. Apparently the church did not retain this view.

Luke 8:4-8 Parable of the sower. The covenant demanded two things: worship (ceremonies, sacrifices) and law (Torah). The Sadducees took care of the former; the Pharisees emphasized the latter. Read (for most, that meant listen to it being read) Torah and obey it. The study of Torah has value. Don't neglect it. Don't let other things crowd it out.

Luke 8:10 Luke offers a partial explanation for why the ideas of Christianity were unknown during the lifetime of Jesus. Jesus taught in parables designed to conceal the meaning from the general public, while supplemented by deeper explanations for the inner circle. This is not how

the rabbis used parables. They used everyday illustrations to make a point, so they would be understood by everyone. Pastors do this today.

Luke 8:26-39 Gadara, and generally the whole area of the Gerasenes, is believed to be thoroughly Gentile territory at the time of Jesus. The large herd of pigs is a clue.

Luke 8:44 This woman was ceremonially unclean, so by touching him, she broke the law. It would have made Jesus unclean. The author needed to portray Jesus as a miracle worker, but also had to explain away why no one had heard of this during his lifetime.

Luke 9:7-9 Herod seems to have collected an odd assortment of rumors about Jesus. All have in common that Jesus was filling the role of a prophet. So far, no sign of Jesus filling the role of a king, even a future king.

Luke 9 (and other places) talk about following Jesus. This meant one of two things: follow Jesus as an apocalyptic political/military leader, and rebel against Rome; or follow Jesus as a rabbinic student (disciple). Bivin covers this second view thoroughly in his second book (*New Light ...*). Count the cost. It won't be easy, but it will be worth it. Study of Torah ranks in importance at a level comparable to (even above) your duty to care for your parents. This broader theme is all over the teachings of Jesus. Study of Torah is a treasure worth selling everything else (Luke 18, or the pearl of great price and others in Matthew 13). Some suggest the hidden treasure in the field refers either to people hunting relics in ruins, or to people looking for where someone buried their wealth (lacking banks) but never retrieved it. In all cases, the point is that searching for treasure by studying Torah is worth the effort.

Luke 9:23, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." To take up the cross is a parallel to take up the yoke, to share in the work. Jesus was calling for people willing to be apostles, to carry on his teaching work, not just disciples, studying under him. Or it's the speech a Zealot would give to motivate recruits.

From Bivin, *New Light*, p. 10, "It was only after A.D. 70 that 'rabbi' became a formal title for a teacher, and thus cannot technically be applied to Jesus. A learned teacher of this time period is commonly referred to as a 'sage,' so that term is a very appropriate way to refer to Jesus." I think it's quite appropriate for the gospel diarists, writing after that time, to use the title in use in their day, rather than the title that might actually have been used for Jesus during his lifetime.

Luke 9:27 This is a prediction, in no uncertain terms, that Israel would be free of Roman rule during the lifetime of some in the audience. It didn't happen.

Luke 9:45 another explanation for why the ideas of Christianity were unknown during the lifetime of Jesus, even by his disciples. That it was hidden from them is Luke's preferred explanation.

Luke 9:58 the life of an itinerant rabbi and his students. (Bivin, *New Light*, p. 25)

Luke 10:1-12 The sending of the 72 is on-the-job training for students preparing to carry on the teaching ministry of a rabbi. The discussion relates mainly to rules of hospitality. It is not clear whether the task includes recruitment to military revolt against Rome.

Luke 10:10-11 refers to a Jewish saying from about 100 years before Jesus, “Let your home be a meeting-house for the sages, and cover yourself with the dust of their feet, and drink in their words thirstily.” It's where the sages would hold classes. Mary is described in these terms. To learn from an itinerant rabbi (the norm), you had to travel with him, and be literally covered in the dust of his feet.

Luke 10:21-24 This is an attempt at an explanation for why the 'secrets' of Christianity were unknown during his lifetime. Texts elsewhere use the copout that it simply wasn't the right time for these secrets to be revealed. This was not Jewish thought. It would have made no sense. But it does sound like the idea that's central to Gnosticism.

Luke 10:25-28 Jesus was answering the question being asked. It's the elevator pitch for Judaism. It doesn't supersede the law, it encapsulates the law. Historically, neighbor meant people like me. Here, Jesus is expressing the view of Hillel that neighbor should include Samaritans.

Luke 10:38-42 another shock: a woman disciple! Jesus allowed women an unusual degree of prominence. This trend did not continue into early Christianity.

Luke 11:5-8 and 18:1-8 the importunate friend and the unjust judge. “In this case, the exaggerated role reversal of the parables employs the Jewish principle of the light and the weighty (*kal vechomer*).” The phrase “how much more” (*al achat kamah vekamah*) often marks the transition between the two. “By giving a comical characterization of what God is not like, Jesus teaches the listeners what God is like.” (Young, Parables p. 40) The theme (and the context) of these parables is prayer. The “persistence” is about the avoidance of shame. The friend in the house is flagrantly neglecting his customary duty of hospitality. The neighbors can hear the exchange. He eventually opens the door to avoid the shame of inhospitality. The “brazen persistence” or “bold tenacity” are really the Hebrew word we know as *chutzpa*, and is generally viewed positively. The introduction to the parable (18:1) appears to be written in Greek by the evangelist, vs. the parable itself in Hebrew.

Luke 11:33-36 the eye as a lamp. I have notes on this somewhere, if I can find them.

Luke 11:37-40 This began with a typical rabbinic difference of opinion about ceremonial hand washing. But it turns into a diatribe. That it is directed at all Pharisees shows that it represents thought of later Christianity, blaming Jews for persecution.

Luke 11:42 This is one of many examples of peer accountability among the Pharisees. They were willing to call each other to task if they were not properly teaching and obeying Torah.

Luke 12:10 Today, we have no idea what the author of this isolated text meant by these words. The honest interpretation is to admit that, rather than base a doctrine on it.

Luke 12:22-34 Give adequate priority to study of Torah. Working for food need not consume all your time and energy. Interesting that the exhortation of v. 33 is to give to the poor, not to give to missionaries or even to pastors. Is this passage a promise that you will never starve?

Luke 12:35-48 Be ready. An explanation for why bad things happen to good people. When the master is away, it seems that the wicked servant is getting away with it. But the time of reckoning will come. Apocalyptic writing.

Luke 12:49-50 Fire is always associated with judgment. The earth (not Jesus) will be immersed in fire (judgment). He had a purpose to bring judgment, though He didn't relish that part of His job. He had compassion. That's why He wanted everyone to repent instead of to experience judgment. (Bivin)

Luke 13:6-9 The second chance for the fig tree was an explanation for why Rome was not yet thrown out.

Luke 13:10-17 From what I can find, there was never any prohibition against healing on Sabbath.

Luke 13:18-35 mustard seed: I'm calling you into a growing venture. Jesus' audience knew what the kingdom of God meant. David (or Saul) started it. The only reason Herod would want to kill Jesus is if he thought Jesus was a Zealot.

Luke 14:15-24 Parable of the great banquet. If you make excuses, and don't join the fight against Rome, don't expect to join the party later. It's not about salvation. Continuing the context, count the cost of joining the rebellion. Or, it's about another common theme. If you want to be a top student of a rabbi, you need to commit to it. No one today can be a disciple of Jesus, not as they used the term. It's not about salvation.

Luke 14:26-33 Count the cost of being a student of an itinerant rabbi. (Bivin, New Light, p. 25)

Luke 15:4-10 This collection represents foundational rabbinic teaching that Torah is a treasure worth seeking. These parables were clearly and often used that way in rabbinic literature throughout the history of Israel, down to the 'present' (the time of Jesus). The background (verses 1-2) is an accusation from the Shammai against Hillel. The lost sheep (and the lost coin) are the lost sheep of the house of Israel. These are the sinners (see the Religious Philosophy section above.). See also Luke 5:27-32.

Luke 15:11-32 The parable of the prodigal son is one of many examples from Jesus, as a rabbi whose teaching aligned quite well with the Hillel school of rabbinic thought (Beit Hillel), making its case in opposition to the Shammai (Beit Shammai) (Moseley p. 107, 147, and others).

The Shammai tended to be isolationists, avoiding Gentiles and sinners. The Hillel school tended to reach out to them, thus the emphasis on finding the lost. The sinner, the lost, is someone of the house of Israel who no longer cares about learning and obeying Torah. The message of all of the parables about the sinner and the lost is that there is hope for the sinner who repents and returns to the study and obedience of Torah. (On the subject of divorce, however, Jesus sided with Shammai. (Young, Meet the Rabbis, p. 45))

Why try to persuade sinners to repent? So God would stop being upset with Israel for disobedience (echo the writings of all the prophets), and resume blessing. This would bring on the Kingdom of God, the good old days, where Israel was an independent nation, the people obeyed God, and the people were blessed.

The opponents of the philosophy of Hillel (those of Shammai, and perhaps also the Sadducees) would feel jealous if Gentiles or sinners (even repentant sinners) got the benefits of Judaism. What the older son said was an expression of this jealousy, as well as the author's excuse for having the father say what he said. The same idea appears in the parable of the laborers.

Luke 16:1-15 is, at best, a badly told story, with conflicting messages. Verse 9 is amoral wealth, not immoral. Verse 14 only those Pharisees which were lovers of money ridiculed.

Luke 16:16-31 is all one sermon about money. Even the divorce part is about money (the dowry). The rich man was there, not because he was rich, but because he didn't obey Torah. The moral of the story: repent, return to obedience of Torah. That included caring for the poor. Verse 25 says that the rich man already got his good stuff, here and now, on earth. His brothers already have Torah (Moses) and the prophets. The dead can't intimidate the brothers from the grave. So the preacher is doing it for them.

Luke 17:1-4 A rabbi often spoke of his students as his little ones or his children. Verse 6 is hyperbole. Verses 7-10 say just do your job. Obey the commandment (v. 4). Forgive. Verse 11 the lepers stood at a distance, as required by law. Verse 16 the Samaritans had their own priests.

Luke 17:20-37 Once the rebellion against Rome starts, it will be too late to change sides in the midst of the rebellion. Choose Rome, and you're on the losing side.

Luke 18:1-8 the persistent widow. The Jews valued the attribute of chutzpah. She was praying for justice against an adversary. Who might that be? Rome. That's what would have immediately come to the mind of the hearers. Got isn't answering that prayer, but keep asking. It's a parable. It's telling the hearer to do likewise. If you stop asking for justice, you show that you don't have faith that God will answer.

Luke 19:8 I give, I restore, both in the present tense. I already do these things.

Luke 19:28-40 The colt represented a king bringing peace; a king bringing war rode a horse. That is, Jesus wasn't leading a rebellion against Rome. Zechariah 9. The colt could well have

been prearranged. Cloaks – Jehu, in 2 Kings 9:13. The time is finally here. John 12:15-16.

Luke 19:41-44 Jesus wept over Jerusalem for its destruction in AD70. The authors didn't understand visitation. Probably the last son of Aaron was killed in AD70.

Luke 20:1-8 Jesus was identifying with the ideology of John the Baptist. Religious leaders of the same ideology wouldn't be asking the question. Here, and in Luke 21:37-38, Did rabbis really teach in the temple? I'm on the lookout for confirming evidence.

Luke 20:9-18 parable of the vineyard and the wicked tenants. It includes an allusion to early mistreatment of prophets. I think this is more likely a parable by the author than a parable by Jesus. The contract with the tenants correlates with the contract between God and Israel. If you want the benefits of Judaism, pay your dues (obedience). Psalm 118 human oppression – divine vindication. Verses 15-16 seem more like a parable of this gospel diarist rather than a parable of Jesus. They are ideas from the much later Christianity of Paul and Peter: inclusion of Gentiles, even to the extent of taking it away from Jews, and killing of the son.

Luke 20:20-25 Jesus takes the Fifth Amendment. The Zealots would have been disappointed. What has Jesus been preaching all his life? Give God what's due to fulfill your side of the covenant: obey Torah.

Luke 20:34 marriage in the afterlife: Jesus gives an untestable explanation.

Luke 20:41-44 Jesus refutes the idea that a messiah must be a descendant of David. A prime example was Cyrus. Jesus will not fulfill a military messiah role. The OT never spoke of 'the' messiah.

Luke 21:1-4 The widow's mite is an extreme story told to make a point.

Luke 21:8 Jesus is asking the people to listen to him instead of to his competition. He wasn't warning about people claiming to be Jesus, but instead, people claiming to fill a role of messiah.

Luke 21:10 Predicting “nation will rise against nation” is like predicting the sun will rise tomorrow.

Luke 22, the passion. The betrayal plot is an explanation of why this peace-loving rabbi was executed. Some say it's also to provide an excuse for anti-Semitism. Only John draws the parallel between the passover lamb and Jesus as the Lamb of God. The natural explanation for the use of the upper room is that it was pre-arranged. There's no justification for claiming anything miraculous.

If Jesus had such a wide and influential following among the people, why would it be necessary for someone to identify him?

Judas is the Greek form of the common name Judah. Hyam Maccoby, Spong and others suggest that Judas is not an individual person, but a personification of Judah (Israel). It's a way of accusing Israel for betraying Jesus, who came to be their savior. From the ESV notes, "Matt 26:15-16 thirty pieces of silver. In the OT, this was the penalty paid by the owner of an ox that gored a slave to death ([Ex. 21:32](#)). Equivalent to about four months' wages for a laborer (about \$7,500 in modern terms), this meager sum suggests the low esteem in which Jesus was held by both Judas and the chief priests."

The passover meal account from Luke 22 is used as the basis of the Christian sacrament of communion. Yet, the practice of that sacrament rarely includes the context of the Passover ceremony. The bread and cup were presented in the form of an object lesson. There's no way his audience would have taken this literally. The main point is that the two elements together represent the life of Jesus being offered as a sacrifice. The cup isn't a second point, but a reiteration of the point. Luke's wording allows for the interpretation that it's not Jesus who is doing the giving. The passover ceremony involved four cups. Luke may be referring to two of them, whereas the other accounts mention only one. The gospel diarists may not have known the details of the Passover observance.

Jesus was asking that next year, when his apostles and/or disciples met together to observe Passover, that they would take time during the observance to remember him. In 1 Cor 11:26, Paul is specific, with "For as often as you eat this bread" referring specifically to the unleavened bread of Passover.

That's a very reasonable thing for a rabbi to ask of his students. Among other things, it would be an annual exhortation to them to continue the life of sacrifice that Jesus had demonstrated during his lifetime. Jesus had been consecrated (Luke 2:22-27) according to Ex 13. I suspect (though I am not yet sure) that most rabbis were first-born males, for this reason.

The theme common to Passover and Christianity is that in both cases, I avoid a very bad consequence simply by believing something and demonstrating it by my actions (blood on the door posts, baptism). The Passover reference was a way of explaining the sacrifice of Jesus.

A sacrifice need not be by death. Ex 13:1-16 speaks of the consecration of the firstborn. If this at one time included human sacrifice by death, that was soon abandoned. I can't tell whether they ever did this, though some ancient societies did. Romans 12 encourages self-sacrifice (though explicitly not the death kind). It can be appropriately said that Mother Theresa gave her life a sacrifice for many.

Luke 22:15-18 It would be crass to call this a hunger strike. But it would be appropriate to see this as one more statement of the belief that the kingdom of God was imminent.

Luke 22:22 The author expressed the idea that to some degree, and in some way, these events were orchestrated by God. The author also tried to preserve the accountability of the perpetrator. As with Pharaoh, this is one of several very problematic situations in which an author is faced

with the inevitable conflict between the autonomy and direct involvement of God with the free will (this accountability) of man.

Luke 22:24-30 The “who is the greatest” dispute arose in the context of the kingdom of God, twice mentioned just before. It portrays the disciples as jockeying for power when the time comes for their leader to assume political leadership of Israel after the yoke of Rome is thrown off. Jesus' response is more consistent with his answer to John the Baptist in Matthew 11. I am here to fill the prophetic messiah role, not the political one.

Luke 22:31-34 The author portrays Jesus as predicting Peter's denial, pre-forgiving him, and predicting his leadership. Perhaps this is so that the early church would accept him as a leader. It seems to begin with an address of endearment. Jesus addresses Jerusalem this way in Luke 13:34.

Luke 22:54-62 Peter's denial is an explanation for why the earliest Jesus movement was so small. A servant girl is the least threatening kind of person one could imagine, a stark contrast to the temple guard with swords and clubs.

Luke 22:66-71 The Sanhedrin asks Jesus if he is the anointed one. His answer is that from now on the son of man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God. This is the position of a king of Israel, God's “right-hand man” to administer God's authority over the nation of Israel. In most places in the synoptics, when Jesus speaks of the son of man, it is not clear whether or not he is speaking of himself. To remove any doubt, they ask if he is the son of God. This is another term commonly used for kings. See 2 Samuel 7:14, speaking of Solomon. His answer, 'you say that I am', is “a Greek expression that deflects responsibility back upon the one asking the question” (ESV footnotes). I would express it something like so you say, or that's for you to decide. Apparently that was enough for the Sanhedrin, since the charge they present to Pilate is that Jesus is saying that he himself is anointed a king. As noted below, both Pilate and Herod find him innocent of this charge.

Luke 23 Jesus is accused before the Roman rulers of claiming the military revolt form of messianic role, working toward becoming the future king of the Jews. He is repeatedly found innocent of that charge. But a key responsibility of Roman officials governing the outlying provinces is to keep the peace, and prevent rebellions and riots of any kind. Thus, Herod and Pilate were well within their authority to execute Jesus. The chief priests and crowds 'were urgent, saying, “He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place.”’ Roman governors executed people for much lesser crimes.

The mockings (and beatings/floggings from other narratives) show Jesus suffering. We know that a sacrificial animal was required to die, but was not required to suffer. Why then are we told of sufferings? One reason is to show what people thought of him. But there may be another philosophical motive. The apocalyptic worldview holds that, in the end, good is rewarded, and evil is punished. Apocalyptic literature of the first century describes that punishment in terms of eternal torture in a lake of fire, weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth. That's suffering. The

Old Testament shows the Jews knowing and making a clear distinction between righteous and wicked people. It's the wicked people who will be punished. Later, Paul is going to say that the class of wicked people is universal (thus, the class of righteous people is empty). The alternative to an eternity of torture (suffering) is no longer righteousness, but instead is belief. If Jesus is to be, not just the sacrificial animal, but the substitution for believers as the recipient of suffering, then Jesus must be shown to suffer. Suffering outside of earth is implied, but limited to at most three days. That leaves suffering on earth. The various mistreatments of Luke 23 are plausible in this respect.

Luke 23:34 "Father forgive them" – Jesus was obeying Luke 6:27, love your enemies. Perhaps this was written (by the same author) to protect the Jews from Acts 2-3. All Israel is guilty, but it is not an unforgivable sin.

Luke 23:35 Jesus was obeying Luke 21:12-18. Also, unlike Luke 5:24, here Jesus is not shown as forgiving sin, but asking the Father to forgive sin.

Luke 23:47 This centurion, who pronounced Jesus innocent of the charges, would surely have known whether Jesus had been promoting insurrection in his territory. That was his main job.

Luke 23:48 beating their breasts, a symbol of grief and repentance.

Luke 24:45 Luke's final explanation for why the ideas of Christianity were unknown during the lifetime of Jesus. He didn't "open the minds" even of the disciples until after his death. See also verses 16 and 31, 9:45, 18:34. In Acts 28:27, the same author calls them 'dull' by citing Isaiah 6. The author of Matthew does the same in Matt 13:14. The gospel authors likely offered differing plausible explanations because they didn't know why.

Luke 24:48 This is a statement of fact, not a commission. They witnessed what happened. You've seen it for yourself.

Luke 24:52 Worship of Jesus did not happen during his lifetime. The Jews would not tolerate it. Hurtado wrote a very good book researching and discussing how and when this likely developed. He is somewhat misled by his assumption that Christianity developed in Jewish communities, rather than in the Greek communities among which it spread, and in whose language all the Christian texts were written.

Acts (volume 2 of Luke)

Probably written 90-95AD, around the time the church and the synagogue were separating. For further liturgy, instead of the OT Kings and Chronicles, why not chronicle the adventures of the church after the death of its founder? (Spong p. 172)

John

The only non-synoptic gospel of the four included in the Canon, differing from them in many ways. Also anonymous, its evangelist author was not associated with a John until probably near the end of the second century. (Miller, p. 196)

As of 2005, the earliest known Greek manuscript is P52, a fragment with a few verses of John 18. That fragment is dated to the early second century. (Ehrman, Misquoting Jesus, p. 88)

John reflects the increasingly virulent relationship between Christians and the rest of (mainstream) Judaism. This is probably around 70 years after the death of Jesus. John's tone is more reflective. By 200AD, it was called the "spiritual gospel", because it told the story in symbolic ways, unlike the synoptics. John has Jesus on the cross while the Passover lambs are being slaughtered. The others have the crucifixion the following day. (Frontline)

Philo Judaeus of Alexandria (20BC-50AD) was a Hellenistic Jewish philosopher. He tried to harmonize Greek philosophy and Judaism, including the Greek (Alexandrian) concept of logos (the word) as God. Perhaps John was trying to differentiate the Jewish concept from the Greek concept. Or using the idea to appeal to both audiences. Wikipedia says Philo's concept of Logos influenced early Christianity. See Wikipedia on logos, and [Memra \(at JewishEncyclopedia.com\)](http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=964&letter=S&search=sons%20of%20god). His purpose is evangelistic and apologetic, John 20:30-31.

Only John attaches metaphysical significance to "son of God", see <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=964&letter=S&search=sons%20of%20god> Also, from that source, 'At all events, the data of the Synoptic Gospels show that Jesus never styled himself the son of God a sense other than that in which the righteous might call themselves "sons" or "children" of God.'

Hurtado explains the Jewish idea of "son of God". "We may understand this ancient Jewish religious outlook as constituting a distinctive version of the commonly attested belief structure described by M. P. Nilsson as involving a 'high god' who presides over other deities. The God of Israel presides over a court of heavenly beings who are in some measure likened to him (as reflected in, for example, the Old Testament term for them, 'sons of God'." (Hurtado, p. 129) "In Greco-Roman Jewish belief, however, the high god is known as the God of Israel, whose ways and nature are revealed in the Scriptures of Israel." (Hurtado, p. 130) I suspect the author of John simply didn't understand this.

The introduction to John draws an exact parallel between Jesus as *Logos* and the *Memra* philosophy of early Jewish theologians (mainly Philo), with all six attributes clearly enumerated in the first chapter of John. (Moseley pp. 133-134)

If the author was the apostle John (rather than John the Elder or some other John), he would have been around 80 years old, much older than the average life expectancy of 20-30 years (Wikipedia), writing 50-60 years after the crucifixion. (Over age 100, according to Spong p. 68) "I know of no reputable scholar in the world today who would support the accuracy of the claim that this gospel [John] was the work of that 'beloved disciple'." (Spong p. 68)

John omits most of the inflammatory statements of Jesus which, in the earlier gospels, aroused anger in Jerusalem. (Diaries p. 170 and others)

“To base theology on the literal words of John is to erect the most fragile of structures. The first cause for suspicion is that there is hardly a word attributed to Jesus in the Fourth Gospel that was recorded in any of the earlier Gospels. More and more scholars acknowledge that most of the words attributed to Jesus in the Fourth Gospel were actually shaped by conflicts in the ninth and tenth decades of the Christian era.” (Spong, p. 13)

“John was a sophisticated symbolizer.” (Spong p. 180)

John is evangelistic writing which reflects thought of at least one school of Christian thought in very late first century. It opens with Philo’s *Logos* philosophy. The followers of Jesus were a sect of Judaism. But it seems to me that if they at any point considered Jesus to be God, they would no longer be allowed to meet in the synagogues. This gospel was written around the time this sect was expelled from the synagogues in Jerusalem (90-95AD). The hypothesized Council of Jamnia condemned those who thought the Messiah had already come. Their condemnation would have been much stronger against anyone claiming Jesus was God. The distance between the religion of John and the religion of the synoptics is far greater than the distance between that of the Protestant and that of the Catholic.

John 4, the Samaritan woman – from Diaries p. 126:

The Samaritans were Gentiles who had been moved into territory vacated by the northern tribes of Israel seven centuries earlier. 2 Kings 17:24 is the scripture. The Samaritans adopted Israel’s God and they accepted the Pentateuch but no other books of the Old Testament. They worshiped on Mount Gerizim and not in the temple in Jerusalem, for the Jewish religious leaders would not allow them to worship at the temple.

John 8:1- – This account of the woman taken in adultery is found only in John. The Mishnah (Moed 3:11) states that a golden plaque with the warning against adultery was placed between the temple court and the door to the sanctuary. That makes the temple a natural place for this encounter. This was the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev. 23:9-14), and probably Sabbath. Ryan Carothers notes that writing in the dirt was not considered work, so was legal on Sabbath. Even if the Jews had still practiced stoning as a punishment for adultery, Roman law would not permit them to impose capital punishment. This likely was a trick question. If Jesus said to stone her, he would rightly be accused of barbaric brutality. If he said not to, he could be accused of not upholding Mosaic law. If not a trick question, it could simply be a debating point or an object lesson between the philosophies of strict interpretation of Torah (Shammai) versus loose interpretation (Hillel). Table 9.6 of Roman Law, "Putting to death... of any man who has not been convicted, whosoever he might be, is forbidden."

John 8:59 – The verb translated ‘hid’ could be translated in either the active or passive voice, depending on the usage. The verse could be saying that the disciples were actively hiding him, or crowding around him as protection. (Diaries p. 177)

John 14:27 – my shalom I give to you – Jesus was answering the question of verse 22. No, I am not going to fulfill your expectations of a messiah. I will not free Israel from Roman rule.

John 16:32 Jesus died alone. (Spong p. 237)

Only John shows Jesus claiming who he is, and using miracles to support that claim. In the synoptics, Jesus shuns miracles. (Ehrman audiobook, History of the Gospels)

Thomas

Though the early church knew of a Gospel of Thomas, they had no copy of it. The first (and perhaps only) complete text (a Coptic translation of the (probably Greek) original) was discovered in the Nag Hammadi Library of Egypt in 1945, long after the Canon had been chosen. It is a sayings collection, not a narrative, and would not necessarily have a singular author. Such collections were common at the time, and would be similar to Proverbs. Authorship was attributed to Thomas, perhaps as an attempt to assert the reliability of the tradition. It is written in the *logoi sophon* (“sayings of the wise”) genre, used by the Wisdom tradition of first century Judaism. The religious background is the Gnostic tradition, featuring the deprecation of the world and the flesh. (Miller, p. 301) It is widely considered authentic by modern scholars (Jenkins, p. 4)

Doctrines

In the early Christian church, there was no orthodoxy of doctrine. “... there existed in the first Christian centuries an enormous range of doctrines and practices, all equally legitimate, all with equal right to boast a link to Jesus and his first apostles. No particular path should *ipso facto* be labeled orthodoxy or heresy. What later became orthodoxy, the Catholic Church, originally held no privileged position, but was just one strand of opinion among many: it was not a case of the mainstream versus the heresies, but rather a struggle of competing mainstreams.” (Jenkins, p. 6)

The first round of “resolutions” to this battle of ideas came with the First Council of Nicaea in 325AD. The winners of the power struggle enumerated their key doctrines in the Nicene Creed, providing the first standard of orthodoxy. That didn’t end the conflicts, so other councils and creeds followed. Canons of the Apostles began to accumulate, reaching over 130 in number, defining Canon Law (ecclesiastical law). A subset of these rulings (or perhaps a separately-counted set?) covers the Biblical canon, or canon of scripture. The Jewish one developed in the range of 200BC - 200AD. The Christian (Catholic) one was formed informally by around 150AD. Formal proclamations were made from 367-405AD, though some didn’t make a formal declaration until the 16th and 17th centuries. (Wikipedia) “The winners chose the canon, and on grounds of political expediency rather than historical judgment.” (Jenkins, p. 8) The books rejected by the winners show Gnosticism in a very different light from that presented in the Catholic canon. But the texts we have for these books are newer than the texts we have for the canonical books. (Jenkins p. 11)

Perhaps the doctrines which survived are those whose proponents were the most persuasive. Paul was certainly a dynamic and forceful personality.

References

1. Grant, Michael, Jesus: An Historian's Review of the Gospels. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1977.
2. Spong, John Shelby, Liberating the Gospels, Reading the Bible with Jewish Eyes. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1996. I must return my copy to the library (others may check it out). I ordered a copy to share with the class.
3. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jesus_Seminar
4. Goulder, Michael, The Evangelist's Calendar. London:SPCK, 1978. I haven't read this, but Spong refers to its calendar.
5. Thiede, Carsten Peter and Matthew d'Ancona, Eyewitness to Jesus. New York: Doubleday, 1996.
6. The Unabridged Gospel Project, The Diaries of Jesus. Houston: Lay Readers Bible Society, 1997. This is a serious scholarly reference, not light reading. It is organized by topic, and encodes the tense, voice, and mood for every verb. Scattered within it are various observations by the project team. I must return my copy to the library (others may check it out). I ordered a copy to share with the class.
7. MacArthur, John, The MacArthur Study Bible. Nashville: Word Bibles, 1997.
8. Miller, Robert J. ed, The Complete Gospels. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1994. I must return my copy to the library (others may check it out). I ordered a copy to share with the class.
9. Jenkins, Philip, Hidden Gospels: How the Search for Jesus Lost Its Way. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001. Jenkins generally defends the choices represented by the Catholic canon, while presenting alternatives. He argues that modern trends claiming to be based on the newly discovered "hidden gospels" go far beyond that which is justified by the new texts.
10. Bivin, David, and Roy Blizzard, Jr., Understanding the Difficult Words of Jesus: New Insights From a Hebraic Perspective. Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, 1983.
11. Bivin, David, New Light on the Difficult Words of Jesus. Holland, MI: En-Gedi Resource Center, Inc., 2007.
12. Ehrman, Bart D., Misquoting Jesus. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2005.

13. [Jerusalem School of Synoptic Research](#)
14. Mosley, Dr. Ron, Yeshua: A Guide to the Real Jesus and the Original Church. Clarksville, MD: Messianic Jewish Publishers, 1996.
15. Young, Brad H., The Parables: Jewish Tradition and Christian Interpretation. Peabody, Massachussetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998.
16. Flusser, David, Judaism and the Origins of Christianity. Jerusalem: Magnes, 1989. I haven't seen this book, but Brad Young says, "Perhaps more than any other scholar, Flusser has pioneered a comprehensive methodology for the study of the Gospel parables that reveals their theological foundation in ancient Judaism through synoptic analysis, comparative study, and linguistic research." (Young, p. 26)
17. PBS Frontline, From Jesus to Christ: The First Christians, January 2009.
18. Young, Brad H., Meet the Rabbis: Rabbinic Thought and the Teachings of Jesus. Peabody, Massachussetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007.
19. Trench, Richard Chenevix, Notes on the Miracles and the Parables of Our Lord, Volume II, Westwood, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1953.
20. Hurtado, Larry W, How On Earth Did Jesus Become a God? -- Historical Questions about Earliest Devotion to Jesus. Grand Rapids Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005 . (Don't be put off by the attention-getting title. This work is relatively conservative Christian scholarship, supporting the idea that considering Jesus as God was a relatively early idea.)
21. Ferguson, Everett, Backgrounds of Early Christianity. Grand Rapids Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003.