

Contrasting Accounts of Jesus

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----|
| Contrasting Accounts of Jesus | 1 |
| Purpose & Approach to Contrasting Accounts..... | 1 |
| Qualifications & Limitations | 3 |
| Account Overview | 5 |
| Structure of the Jesus Accounts | 7 |
| 1. Birth of Jesus | 7 |
| 2. Miracles - Healing | 9 |
| 3. Miracles – Nature..... | 12 |
| 4. Parables | 14 |
| 5. Death | 20 |
| 6. Resurrection | 23 |
| Content & Viewpoints..... | 27 |
| 7. Charity | 27 |
| 8. Disciples..... | 33 |
| 9. Divinity of Jesus | 37 |
| 10. Economy of Redistribution | 42 |
| 11. Eschatology | 54 |
| 12. Gentiles | 57 |
| 13. Heaven | 63 |
| 14. Hell..... | 75 |
| 15. Kingdom of God at Hand..... | 84 |
| 16. Message Ambivalence | 91 |
| 17. Messiah | 106 |

| | |
|--------------------------------|-----|
| 18. Prophecy Historicized..... | 111 |
| 19. Prophecy Projected | 122 |
| 20. Salvation | 136 |
| 21. Social Revolutionary..... | 151 |
| 22. Torah Law | 174 |
| 23. Trinity | 180 |
| 24. Wisdom & Word..... | 191 |
| 25. Women..... | 200 |

Contrasting Accounts of Jesus

To modern eyes, Jesus of Nazareth is presented as a prophet, a teacher, a healer, a social revolutionary – even God. This Jesus the Christ seemingly has his act together. We view a composite, yet unified portrait – witness the many Renaissance paintings of a pale, gaunt, stoic and glassy-eyed Savior.

Jesus is the same – yesterday, today and forever. There is harmony of the gospels – an ability to weave disparate accounts together forming a single, coherent tapestry of Jesus' birth, ministry, death and resurrection.

Is it really this easy?

Is the Jesus of Matthew the same as the Jesus portrayed in Luke? What about the gospels of Mark and John? Not to mention the more limited portrayals of Jesus in other epistles of the New Testament? What happens if we step outside the bounds of accepted New Testament, to include other largely contemporaneous albeit non-canonical Christian gospels?

Just as interestingly, what happens when we confine our gaze to the writings of just a single author? Can the teachings and actions of Jesus be considered *as internally consistent* when viewed from the perspective of Matthew alone? Or Mark? Or Luke? Or John?

Purpose & Approach to Contrasting Accounts

The purpose of this review is to address the questions of whether Jesus is best viewed as highly logical, consistent and well defined. Or is this an individual who offered multiple and seemingly conflicting messages? If so, what might they mean?

Rather than starting from the premise that there is a harmony inherent to the New Testament, we take the opposite tack. The hypothesis at the core of this research is that the story of Jesus is not necessarily one of consistency and harmony, but rather more an account of contradiction and conflict.

The remainder of this work presents evidence of conflicting interpretations for Jesus organized around a series of 24 different topics. The first 6 topics address consistency of the narrative *structure* with which the Jesus story is told – from birth to death and resurrection. The next 18 topics cover contrasting viewpoints regarding 18 separate theological topics – ranging from role of charity in Jesus' ministry to Jesus' acceptance of women.

Structure:

1. Birth of Jesus – by mention or more complete description
2. Healing Miracles – apparent curing of physical or psychological illnesses by Jesus
3. Nature Miracles – involving apparent supernatural control over empirically observed physical laws of nature
4. Parables – examples of the unique stories and allegories spoken by Jesus
5. Death of Jesus – by mention or more complete description
6. Resurrection – similarly by mention or more complete description

Content & Viewpoints:

7. Charity – emphasis on actions and sayings of Jesus out of love for others, particularly those viewed as disenfranchised within the society of the time
8. Disciples – whether the twelve chosen are portrayed in a positive way
9. Divinity of Jesus – notably whether Jesus is identified as God
10. Economy of Redistribution – indicating support for distributing financial or other material resources to the disenfranchised
11. Eschatology – denoting emphasis on prophesy including apocalyptic descriptions (of the end times)
12. Gentiles – whether Jesus explicitly indicated acceptance
13. Heaven – identification as an after-life with God
14. Hell – identification as an afterlife separated from God (or as other terms translated by various Bible versions for Hell)
15. Kingdom of God Now – with emphasis on the degree to which the kingdom is available on earth during human existence
16. Message Ambivalence – denoting apparent inconsistencies in the teachings or actions of Jesus
17. Messiah – representing Jesus as the fulfillment of Jewish prophecy as the anointed of God.
18. Prophecy Historicized – involving claims of Old Testament prophecy fulfillment by Jesus
19. Prophecy Projected – with claims made by Jesus of future conditions subsequent to his death and resurrection
20. Salvation – specifically linked to the concepts of faith and grace
21. Social Revolution – based on whether Jesus is portrayed as advocating changes in governmental or political structures (outside the spiritual sphere)
22. Torah Law – whether adherence was explicitly advocated by Jesus
23. Trinity – belief in the divine concept of Father, Son and Holy Spirit as three in one.
24. Wisdom & Word – portrayal of Jesus in these spiritual/non-material terms
25. Women – based on whether Jesus explicitly advocated equal or compensatory treatment

Each of these topics is covered from the perspective, first, of the four canonical gospel writers, then from the New Testament epistles of Paul and James, then from Thomas and the other so-called non-canonical gospels.¹

Of the Pauline gospels, we rely primarily on epistles to the Romans, Corinthians, and Galatians as most widely ascribed to Paul's authorship by scholars and theologians of all stripes. For John's writings, focus on the fourth gospel, since authorship of the Johannine epistles and the Apocalypse (Revelation) has been more widely disputed.

Qualifications & Limitations

Items worth noting as we launch into this comparative analysis include use of citations and notations followed by other limitations of import to the reader.

Citations: Extensive use of citations from the canonical New Testament and non-canonical gospels are made throughout this presentation. Extensive use of footnotes is also provided, for purposes of citing a reference and/or providing additional detail.

Except where noted otherwise, the quotations for canonical text of the New Testament are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). Quotations for non-canonical gospel texts cited generally are from the Scholars Version (SV).

Italicization occurs for either of two reasons: (a) citation of a non-biblical text; and (b) to provide emphasis for a key point of the discussion. Words *italicized for emphasis* reflect the perspective of this author only, and are not to be construed as part of any other text unless so noted.

Generous footnoting reflects our interest in clear documentation and ready referral for the material provided with these 12 heresies. Footnotes typically are indicated for original source documents and as more detailed, explanatory text. While footnotes are from sources generally deemed to be reliable, not all have been fully researched and verified by this author.

Notations: Recent scholarly and theological works have changed some terminology, but this work generally uses the more familiar conventions of:

- BC (before Christ) as describing the period before Christ in place of the more contemporary BCE (before common era).

¹ Source is *The Complete Gospels: Annotated Scholars Version* (San Francisco: Harper Collins), 1994. Non-canonical documents included in this document include the Gospel of Thomas, Secret Book of James, Dialogue of the Savior, Gospel of Mary, Infancy Gospel of Thomas, Infancy Gospel of James, Gospel of Peter, Secret Gospel of Mark, Egerton Gospel, Oxyrhynchus 840, Oxyrhynchus 1224, Gospel of the Hebrews, Gospel of the Ebionites, Gospel of the Nazoreans, and other so-called Orphan Sayings and Stories.

- AD (anno domini) as describing the period from Christ rather than the more contemporary CE (common era).

In many places the term Hebrew Scripture is used in place of the more conventional term Old Testament (OT). This is because the use of OT is viewed by some as pejorative toward those of Jewish faith.

A variety of bracketing notes are used with some historical references, particularly non-canonical writings that remain fragmentary in nature:

- < > indicating a subject, object or other element implied by the original language and supplied by the translator.
- [] for words that have been restored from a lacuna or emended from an apparent scribal error.
- [...] as a lacuna or gap in a manuscript that can not be satisfactorily restored.
- () applied in the normal sense for parenthetical remarks.

Unless noted otherwise, quotations from the Old and New Testaments use the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). Non-canonical gospel quotations are from the Scholars Version (SV). Other versions cited on occasion include the New King James (NKJV) and New International Version (NIV).

Limitations: This review of *Contrasting Accounts of Jesus* represents a work in progress. Information has been obtained from sources generally deemed to be reliable. However, neither the accuracy of the source text nor our citation is guaranteed.

Comments, questions, clarifications and corrections submitted to the author are appreciated. We reserve the right to make revisions and provide updated material without notice.

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Account Overview

We begin this presentation with a chart -- summarizing the contrasting accounts of Jesus provided by the four gospel writers. Also included in the comparison are views that can be derived from the writings of the apostle Paul, James (the brother of Jesus), the so-called Gospel of Thomas, and other identified non-canonical gospel sources of the early church period.

| Characteristic | Matthew | Mark | Luke | John | James | Paul | Thomas | Other Gospels |
|----------------------------------|---------|------|------|------|-------|------|--------|---------------|
| Structure: | | | | | | | | |
| 1. Birth of Jesus | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Miracles – Healing | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Miracles – Nature | | | | | | | | |
| 4. Parables | | | | | | | | |
| 5. Death of Jesus | | | | | | | | |
| 6. Resurrection | | | | | | | | |
| Content & Viewpoints: | | | | | | | | |
| 7. Charity | | | | ? | | | | |
| 8. Disciples (positive view) | | | | | | | ? | |
| 9. Divinity of Jesus | | | | | | | | |
| 10. Economy of Redistribution | | | | | | | | |
| 11. Eschatology | | | | | | | | |
| 12. Gentiles (acceptance) | | | | | | | | |
| 13. Heaven (identification) | | | | | | | | |
| 14. Hell (identification) | | | | | | | | |
| 15. Kingdom of God Now | | | | | | | | |
| 16. Message Ambivalence | | | ? | | | | | ? |
| 17. Messiah | | | | | | | | |
| 18. Prophecy Historicized | | | | | | | | |
| 19. Prophecy Projected | | | | | | | | |
| 20. Salvation (faith vs. grace) | | | | | | | | |
| 21. Social Revolution | | | | | | | | |
| 22. Torah Law (adherence) | | | | | | | | |
| 23. Trinity | | | | | | | | |
| 24. Wisdom & Word | | | | | | | | |
| 25. Women (acceptance) | | | | | | | | |

Legend:  = Good Fit  = Partial Fit  = Little or No Fit

Each account is assessed based on the degree to which the characteristic expressed appears to *fit* (or correspond) with the account of each account. Those identified as *good fit* are books which appear to strongly support or endorse the concept or characteristic considered.

A *partial fit* is noted for books where a case can be made, but the evidence is more scant or inferential (rather than explicit). And those indicated as *little or no fit* indicate writings

that either directly contradict or simply do not have any reference to a particular characteristic.

In a few cases, question marks are noted. In these situations, the text and its application are more uncertain – or may be ambivalent with opinions both pro and con expressed.

This *at-a-glance* chart reveals both strong similarities between some accounts of the Jesus story as well as definite differences. There is virtually no topic for which complete unanimity of opinion can be found across these sources.

On issues of *structure*, there is general consistency across the four gospels – except for topics addressing Jesus’ birth, healing miracles, and use of parables. There is much less consistency indicated for the other New Testament and non-canonical writers.

On issues of *content and viewpoint*, there is considerable divergence of opinion even among the gospel writers. Out of 18 topics, there is not one topic for which all four gospels are in full agreement.

The gospels of Matthew and Luke parallel each other most in content and viewpoint, although there are major differences on views regarding such topics as charity, economics of the kingdom, timing of the kingdom of God, social action and role of women.

Mark and John are more distinctive, varying in outlook from the gospels of Matthew/Luke and from each other. Mark is ambivalent on more topics than any of the other gospel writers.

Perspectives of James are considerably different from those of Paul. The non-canonical Gospel of Thomas aligns closely with Luke on items such as extensive use of parables, emphasis on charity, and imminence of the kingdom of God. Thomas aligns with Mark in the ambivalence of Jesus’ message and with John with absence of any reference to hell.

As might be expected, the other gospels (outside the accepted New Testament) reflect quite varied approaches in their interpretation of Jesus life and ministry. Of note is the absence of Jesus’ parables, the non-acceptance of Gentiles, and the lack of any reference to hell in these non-canonical works.

Nearly 20 centuries of Christian tradition have conditioned us to expect a harmony of the Jesus accounts. The reality is that harmony gives way to dissonance. The unified portrait of Jesus is replaced by the collage – of seemingly disparate, sometimes jarring images.

Is it any surprise that even modern Christendom presents no unified interpretation – but rather multiple denominations, sects and schisms? But the news is not all necessarily bad.

The Jesus who emerges from these disparate accounts is infinitely more interesting and engaging. Multiple images of this reputed god-man in action capture our attention longer than the single, glazed portrait. Who could ask for more?

Structure of the Jesus Accounts

With this quick overview tour in mind, we now proceed to review each of these topics – and the varied viewpoints engendered – in more detail.

The first 6 topics address consistency of the narrative *structure* with which the Jesus story is told. The topics cover key features of the various gospel narratives and epistles considered – notably the birth of Jesus, healing miracles, nature miracles, use of parables, the death of Jesus, and the resurrection.

1. Birth of Jesus

Throughout the Christian and much of the secular world, there is no bigger event than Christmas. While important as an opportunity for mass merchandising in the western world, there is no mistaking that this event is also to commemorate the birth of Jesus approximately two millennia ago. Yet, despite universal awareness today, the historical details and their relevance to Christian faith vary considerably among the early writers of Christianity.

Gospel Accounts: While the birth of Christ ranks as one of the most celebrated events of Christendom, the birth narrative appears important enough to mention by only two of the four gospel writers -- Matthew and Luke. In contrast, both the gospels of Mark and John begin by introducing John the Baptist who heralds the arrival and baptism of Jesus. However, an important commonality between all four introductions is to proclaim Jesus' direct linkage to the divine.²

There are considerable points of agreement but also key differences in the respective birth accounts of Matthew and Luke. Both gospels emphasize the virgin birth of Christ. However, only Matthew (incorrectly) invokes the prophet Isaiah as a rationale for the virgin birth.³

There is less in common between Matthew and Luke when it comes to the details of the birth narrative. For starters, the two authors offer different genealogies (or statements of Jesus' ancestral lineage).

Matthew's account includes the appearance of an angel in Joseph's dream, the visit of the wise men, subsequent flight to Egypt and massacre of the innocents by King Herod. Luke's narrative is considerably more detailed, but covers a completely different set of

² In Matthew and Luke, the divine linkage is in the overshadowing of mother Mary by the Holy Spirit. In Mark, the divine relationship is stated as Jesus comes out of the water of baptism with a voice from heaven proclaiming him as "my Son" (Mark 1:11, NRSV). In the gospel of John, there is the subsequent testimony by John the Baptist that he is the "Son of God" (John 1:34, NRSV).

³ More on the mistaken translation by Matthew of Isaiah is provided in the discussion of Prophecy Historicized as a later topic in this analysis.

topics (except for the angel's visit to Joseph). Unique aspects of Luke's story involve the relationship of Mary with Elizabeth (mother of John the Baptist), shepherds in the field, and circumcision of Jesus in the Temple.

A separate and as yet not fully unresolved conflict between Matthew and Luke involves the date of Jesus' birth. Matthew clearly places the birth during the latter part of the reign of King Herod (who died in 4 BC). Luke places the birth as occurring during the governorship of Syria by Quirinius (whose term began about 10 years later or in approximately 6 AD).⁴

While most of the action commonly reported is with Matthew and Luke, there are important references to the birth (and childhood) of Jesus elsewhere in the New Testament as well as in so-called non-canonical gospels. As the most prolific New Testament writer, it is perhaps most appropriate to start with the apostle Paul.

James & Paul: Paul's letters do not provide any narrative account of Jesus life (except for the passion accounts). However, Paul does briefly allude to his birth, for example, in Galatians describing Jesus as "born of a woman, born under the law."⁵ In contrast, the short letter of James makes no reference to Jesus birth or parentage, though the author traditionally has been identified as the brother of Jesus.

Non-Canonical Gospels: Of the so-called non-canonical gospels, the sayings of Thomas do not directly address the birth of Jesus though there are several interesting allusions. For example, Thomas quotes the woman in the crowd who calls out: "Lucky are the womb that bore you and the breasts that fed you."

Thomas also refers to Jesus' family in a way that parallels accounts in all three synoptics. This non-canonical gospel indicates that members of Jesus family, who were waiting outside to see Jesus, followed by the sharp retort from Jesus that: "Those here who do what my Father wants are my brothers and my mother."⁶

Perhaps most interesting is the somewhat obscure saying attributed to Thomas that: "Whoever knows the father and the mother will be called the child of a whore."⁷ Whether or not he would be referring to rumors associated with his own unusual parentage situation is not stated.⁸

⁴ This conflict in dates has long confounded historians. One possible solution (generally advanced by more fundamental theologians) is that Quirinius may have served an earlier term (from about 6-4 BC).

⁵ Galatians 4:4.

⁶ Thomas 99. A similar account of Jesus response is contained in the non-canonical Gospel of The Ebionites, Chapter 5.

⁷ Thomas 105.

⁸ Both the Gospel of Thomas and the Infancy Gospel of Thomas contain information suggesting a possible close familial relationship between Thomas and Jesus. For example, notes to *The Complete Gospels* by Robert J. Miller, Editor states that: "Thomas is known as Didymus, 'the twin.'" This is presumably the

There are numerous references to Jesus birth and childhood in other non-canonical gospels. The Infancy Gospel of Thomas provides no birth account but the most detailed known early narrative of Jesus childhood including incidents involving both parents Mary and Joseph. The Infancy Gospel of James offers a description of the parentage of Mary (as a virgin before and after the birth of Jesus).

A final non-canonical reference to Jesus is provided by the Gospel of Hebrews, part of the genre of Jewish-Christian gospels. This gospel has the angel Michael take on the form of Mary to give birth to the Christ.

Jesus Birth in Summary: While the birth of Jesus has become critically important to the Christian heritage, the details come from a variety of authors who offer widely divergent accounts. However, differing details have become less important than the central credal premise of a virgin birth. The virginity of Jesus mother is not contradicted by any of the early written Christian and related accounts available – whether or outside the accepted canon.

2. Miracles - Healing

Did Jesus really heal others? What do our early writers have to say on this subject?

Many modern commentators make a distinction between what can be termed healing versus nature miracles. For those skeptical of phenomena not readily explained scientifically, healing miracles are often viewed as more believable than those miracles altering natural events (such as calming a storm).⁹ This is because the healing event (such as casting out a demon or even curing illnesses like blindness or palsy) can be viewed as subject to the powers of psychological suggestion.¹⁰

Consequently, we start with the sub-category of *healing* miracles.

Gospel Accounts: A total of 23 healing miracles are described by one or more of the gospel writers.¹¹

same apostle as the Didymus Judas Thomas who figures in the Gospel of Thomas and the Judas Thomas, the Twin of Jesus, who is the hero of the *Acts of Thomas*.”

⁹ The Jesus Seminar, for example, assigns a greater degree of historical veracity to healing than to nature miracles.

¹⁰ Steven Davies views those healed as subject to altered states of consciousness.

¹¹ This list of healing miracles includes three accounts of raising the dead to life, which are assigned to the nature miracle category. This listing is based on *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, 1985.

Healing Miracles in the New Testament Gospels

| Nature Miracle | Matthew | Mark | Luke | John |
|-----------------------------|----------|----------|----------|---------|
| Man with leprosy | 8:2-4 | 1:40-42 | 5:12-13 | -- |
| roman centurion's servant | 8:5-13 | -- | 7:1-10 | -- |
| Peter's mother-in-law | 8:14-15 | 1:30-31 | 4:38-39 | -- |
| Two men from Gadara | 8:28-34 | 5:1-5 | 8:27-35 | -- |
| Paralyzed man | 9:2-7 | 2:3-12 | 5:18-25 | -- |
| Woman with bleeding | 9:20-22 | 5:25-29 | 8:43-48 | -- |
| Two blind men | 9:27-31 | -- | -- | -- |
| Man mute & possessed | 9:32-33 | -- | -- | -- |
| Man with a shriveled hand | 12:10-13 | 3:1-5 | 6:6-10 | -- |
| Man blind, mute & possessed | 12:22 | -- | 11:14 | -- |
| Canaanite woman's daughter | 15:21-28 | 7:24-30 | -- | -- |
| Boy with a demon | 17:14-18 | 9:17-29 | 9:38-43 | -- |
| Two blind men (one named) | 20:29-34 | 10:46-52 | 18:35-43 | -- |
| Deaf mute | -- | 7:31-37 | -- | -- |
| Man possessed, synagogue | -- | 1:12-26 | 4:33-35 | -- |
| Blind man at Bethsaida | -- | 8:22-26 | -- | -- |
| Crippled woman | -- | -- | 13:11-13 | -- |
| Man with dropsy | -- | -- | 14:1-4 | -- |
| Ten men with dropsy | -- | -- | 17:11-19 | -- |
| The high priest's servant | -- | -- | 22:50-51 | -- |
| Official's son at Capernaum | -- | -- | -- | 4:46-54 |
| Sick man, pool of Bethesda | -- | -- | -- | 5:1-9 |
| Man born blind | -- | -- | -- | 9:1-7 |

Of the 23 distinct healing miracles identified in the canonized gospels:

- 13 are found in Matthew
- 12 are found in Mark
- 15 are found in Luke
- 3 are found in John

The following combinations also are noted:

- 0 are found in all four gospels (John records no miracles that overlap with any of the three synoptics)
- 8 are found in all three synoptics
- 1 is found in only Matthew and Mark¹²
- 2 are found in only Matthew and Luke
- 1 is found in only Mark and Luke¹³

And some parables are unique to individual synoptics:

- 2 are found only in Matthew

¹² The miracle that only Matthew and Mark have in common is the healing of the Canaanite woman's daughter.

¹³ The healing miracle found only in Mark and Luke is the healing of the possessed man at the synagogue.

- 2 are unique to Mark
- 4 are found only in Luke
- 3 are unique to John (these are the only healing miracles except for resurrections recounted by John)

With two exceptions, the order of the miracles presented in Mark generally follow those of Matthew. There is little correspondence in the *ordering* of miracles that Matthew and Luke have in common. However, there is a one-to-one correspondence in the ordering of miracles that Mark and Luke both recount.

James & Paul: While James provides no mention of either healing or nature miracles, the non-canonical gospels provide examples of both. The Gospel of Thomas is introduced with the saying: “Whoever discovers the interpretation of these sayings will not taste death.”¹⁴ A similar theme is found later in Thomas, combining a nature and healing miracle.¹⁵

The writings of Paul are focused primarily on the death and resurrection of Jesus as the seminal healing miracle. Paul’s purpose for describing the resurrection is usually a theological explanation, such as this text in: “...It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.”¹⁶

While not mentioned directly by Paul, Luke’s Acts of the Apostles provides at least three incidents associated with divine intervention in the health of the apostle Paul or those with whom he comes in contact. The first is the blinding and later restoration of vision that occurs at the time of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus.¹⁷

Much later, as Paul journeys two Rome, two healing miracles are noted (in Acts 28). The first involves Paul’s non-reaction to a viper bite while building a fire – after being shipwrecked at the island of Malta.¹⁸ Also at Malta, Paul heals the father of the leading man of the island from fever and dysentery by “praying and putting his hands on him.”¹⁹ And Paul subsequently cures disease of others on the island who came for healing.

Non-Canonical Gospels: In the Infancy Gospel of Thomas, Jesus is attributed with several healing miracles, but with a less than auspicious beginning in early childhood. In a fit of anger, Jesus withers a boys hand, then Jesus curse results in immediate death for a boy who bumps into Jesus in the village, and finally blinds villagers who complain of his behavior. Subsequently, he reverses the curse of blindness after laughingly proclaiming:

¹⁴ Thomas 1.

¹⁵ In Thomas 111, Jesus says: “The heavens and the earth will roll up in your presence, and whoever is living from the living one will not see death.” (SV)

¹⁶ Romans 4:24-25.

¹⁷ Acts 9.

¹⁸ Acts 28.

¹⁹ Acts 9:8.

“I’ve come from above so that I might save those who are below and summon them to higher things, just as the one who sent me to you commanded me.”²⁰

As Jesus gets older, his intervention in the health of others now begins to take a more positive course. He restores to life a child who had fallen from a roof, heals the foot of a man severed in chopping wood, stops the effects of poisonous venom from a viper that bit brother James, and resurrects both an infant and a construction worker.

One other reference to a non-canonical healing miracle can be found in the Egerton gospel. In this account Jesus both heals a leper and sends him to the priests for ritual cleansing.

Healing Miracles Summarized: Jesus is widely acknowledged throughout the New Testament as well as extra-canonical works of the first several centuries as a healer. The only gospel that de-emphasizes Jesus’ healing ministry is John – but Jesus’ capacity as a healer is well displayed by the fourth gospel writer as well as the three synoptics.

Modern critics have questioned the legitimacy of Jesus’ supernatural power, positing that these healings were more likely the result of psychosomatic suggestion than medical interventions. Whatever the source of the cure, there is no denying that a healing ministry is an integral component of the Jesus story. To deny this healing legacy, one might as well deny the very existence of Jesus.

3. Miracles – Nature

To the contemporary mind, miracles that appear to alter the physical laws of nature are more difficult to believe than those that can be explained psychologically. Unfortunately for the modern skeptic, all four gospels and many of the non-canonical gospels contain accounts of Jesus appearing to supercede the laws of the natural universe.

Gospel Accounts: There are a total of 12 miracles recounted in the gospels wherein Jesus effectively overcomes the normal functioning of the natural environment. These include 3 resurrection miracles and 9 other nature miracles.

Nature Miracles in the Gospels

| Nature Miracle | Matthew | Mark | Luke | John |
|--------------------------------|-------------|----------------|----------------|---------|
| Resurrections: | | | | |
| Jairus’ daughter | 9:18-19, 25 | 5:22-24, 38-42 | 8:41-42, 49-56 | -- |
| Widow’s son at Nain | -- | -- | 7:11-15 | -- |
| Lazarus | -- | -- | -- | 11:1-44 |
| Other Natural Miracles: | | | | |
| Calming the storm | 8:23-27 | 4:37-41 | 8:22-25 | -- |
| Walking on the water | 14:25 | 6:48-51 | -- | 6:19-21 |
| 5,000 people fed | 14:15-21 | 6:35-44 | 9:12-17 | 6:5-13 |

²⁰ Infancy Thomas 8:2.

| Nature Miracle | Matthew | Mark | Luke | John |
|--------------------------|----------|-----------------|--------|---------|
| 4,000 people fed | 15:32-38 | 8:1-9 | -- | -- |
| Coin in the fish's mouth | 17:24-27 | -- | -- | -- |
| Fig tree withered | 21:18-22 | 11:12-14, 20-25 | -- | -- |
| Catch of fish | -- | -- | 5:4-11 | -- |
| Water turned into wine | -- | -- | -- | 2:1-11 |
| Another catch of fish | -- | -- | -- | 21:1-11 |

Of the 12 nature miracles described in the gospels:

- 7 are found in Matthew
- 7 are found in Mark
- 5 are found in Luke
- 5 are found in John

The following combinations also are noted:

- 1 nature miracle is found in all four gospels (the feeding of the 5,000)
- 2 others are found in all three synoptics (raising of Jairus' daughter and calming the storm)
- 1 is found only in Matthew, Mark and John
- 2 are found in only Matthew and Mark
- 0 are found in only Matthew and Luke
- 0 are found in only Mark and Luke²¹

And some parables are unique to individual synoptics:

- 1 is found only in Matthew (the coin in the fish's mouth)
- 0 are unique to Mark²²
- 2 are found only in Luke (raising the widow's son at Nain and the catch of fish)
- 3 are found only in John (the raising of Lazarus, water turned to wine and another catch of fish)

It is noted that Luke provides more accounts of healing miracles than the other synoptics, but fewer nature miracles. John is the only gospel writer to provide more nature (including resurrection) than healing miracles.

James & Paul: In the writings of both James and Paul, there are no clear references to nature miracles. However, the earthquake that releases Paul and Silas from prison in

²¹ This is the parable of the watchful servants.

²² The only parable distinct to Mark is that of the growing seed (6:26-29). This parable serves to illustrate two unique Markan view (both the mystery of the growth and the immediacy of action), as follows: "The kingdom of god is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come."

Philippi could be listed as a nature miracle.²³ So could Paul's apparent resistance to a venomous snake bite.²⁴

Non-Canonical Gospels: The Gospel of Thomas uses a prospective nature miracle to enhance the position of Thomas among his peers. For example, Jesus leaves a discussion with other disciples to talk privately with Thomas. When Thomas returns, the others ask: "What did Jesus say to you?" Thomas response is that: "If I tell you one of the sayings he spoke to me, you will pick up rocks and stone me, and fire will come from the rocks and devour you."²⁵

Thomas also mentions a saying similar to that found in the three synoptics, stating: "If two make peace with each other in a single house, they will say to the mountain, 'Move from here!' and it will move."²⁶

A handful of the other non-canonical gospels also provide examples of nature miracles. The Infancy Gospel of Thomas has child Jesus fashioning twelve sparrows from clay who take on life and fly away, recovering water from a broken pitcher and stretching a board for his carpenter father.

The fragmentary Gospel of Peter refers to the veil of the temple being torn in two at the time of Jesus' death and also provides an account of his subsequent resurrection. And an even more fragmentary passage in the Egerton gospel appears to refer to an incident where Jesus scatters something over the Jordan River, leading to spontaneous growth. However, the poor condition of the papyrus manuscript makes a full reconstruction of this text and associated difficult.

Nature Miracles Summarized: As with the healing miracles of Jesus, there is clear support for Jesus' performance of nature miracles – at least from the four gospels plus the non-canonical gospels. For those who would separate healing from nature miracles, the early church literature provides little solace.

Contravention of the apparent physical laws of nature is as much a part of Jesus legacy as is his reputation for healing. From an historical perspective, there is no more reason to deny one type of miracle than another.

4. Parables

Jesus imparts much of his message – particularly his views regarding the kingdom of heaven – via a distinctive storytelling mechanism known as the parable. One definition of the term follows:

²³ As recounted by Luke in Acts 16.

²⁴ Described in Acts 28.

²⁵ Thomas 13.

²⁶ Thomas 48. A similar saying is found in Thomas 106.

“A parable is a brief narrative or picture. It is also a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or the common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought.”²⁷

Gospel Accounts: An interesting feature of this definition is the thought that Jesus’ use of parables may intentionally have been to create ambiguity rather than clarity for the listener. This viewpoint is certainly echoed directly by the disciples. For example, after telling the parable of the sower to a large crowd, Jesus explains the purpose of parables to the more limited audience of his disciples:

To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables; in order that they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand; so that they may not turn again and be forgiven.²⁸

Jesus directly asks his disciples: “Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand all the parables?”²⁹ Jesus then goes on to directly explain, in detail, the meaning of each aspect of the parable of the sower.

As with miracles, both the canonical and non-canonical sources are steeped in the use of parables that are an important part of Jesus’ teaching method. However, there are significant differences between the writers in the extent to which this teaching form is used.³⁰ The listing below is organized first around the sequence found in Matthew.

Parables of the Synoptics

| Parable | Matthew | Mark | Luke |
|---------------------------|-----------------|--------------|--------------|
| Lamp under a bowl | 5:14-15 | 4:21-22 | 8:16; 11:33 |
| Wise & foolish builders | 7:24-27 | -- | 6:47-49 |
| New cloth on an old coat | 9:16 | 2:21 | 5:36 |
| New wine in old wineskins | 9:17 | 2:22 | 5:37-38 |
| Sower and the soils | 13:3-8, 18-23 | 4:3-8, 14-20 | 8:5-8, 11-15 |
| Weeds | 13:24-30, 36-43 | -- | |
| Mustard seed | 13:31-32 | 4:30-32 | 13:18-19 |
| Yeast | 13:33 | -- | 13:20-21 |
| Hidden treasure | 13:44 | -- | -- |
| Valuable pearl | 13:45-46 | -- | -- |
| Net | 13:47-50 | -- | -- |
| Owner of a house | 13:52 | -- | -- |
| Lost sheep | 18:12-14 | -- | 15:4-7 |
| Unmerciful servant | 18:23-34 | -- | -- |

²⁷ This definition is from *The Five Gospels* developed through the Jesus Seminar, First Scribner Edition, 1996.

²⁸ Mark 3:11-12.

²⁹ Mark 3:13.

³⁰ The listing of parables shown is based on a list in *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, 1985.

| Parable | Matthew | Mark | Luke |
|---------------------------|----------------|-------------|-------------|
| Workers in the vineyard | 20:1-16 | -- | -- |
| Two sons | 21:28-32 | -- | -- |
| Tenants | 21:33-44 | 12:1-11 | 20:9-18 |
| Wedding banquet | 22:2-14 | -- | -- |
| Fig tree | 24:32-35 | 13:28-29 | 21:29-31 |
| Faithful and wise servant | 24:45-51 | -- | 12:42-48 |
| Ten virgins | 25:1-13 | -- | -- |
| Talents (minas) | 25:14-30 | -- | 19:12-27 |
| Sheep & goats | 25:31-46 | -- | -- |
| Growing seed | -- | 4:26-29 | -- |
| Watchful servants | -- | 13:35-37 | 12:35-40 |
| Moneylender | -- | -- | 7:41-43 |
| Good Samaritan | -- | -- | 10:30-37 |
| Friend in need | -- | -- | 11:5-8 |
| Rich fool | -- | -- | 12:16-21 |
| Unfruitful fig tree | -- | -- | 13:6-9 |
| Lowest seat at the feast | -- | -- | 14:7-14 |
| Great banquet | -- | -- | 14:16-24 |
| Cost of discipleship | -- | -- | 14:28-33 |
| Lost coin | -- | -- | 15:8-10 |
| Lost (prodigal) son | -- | -- | 15:11-32 |
| Shrewd manager | -- | -- | 16:1-8 |
| Rich man & Lazarus | -- | -- | 16:19-31 |
| Master & his servant | -- | -- | 17:7-10 |
| Persistent widow | -- | -- | 18:2-8 |
| Pharisee & tax collector | -- | -- | 18:10-14 |

Of the 40 distinct parables identified in the gospels:

- 23 are found in Matthew
- 9 are found in Mark
- 28 are found in Luke
- 0 are found in John

The following combinations also are noted:

- 7 are found in all three synoptics
- 0 are found in only Matthew and Mark
- 5 are found in only Matthew and Luke
- 1 is found in only Mark and Luke³¹

And some parables are unique to individual synoptics:

- 11 are found only in Matthew (almost 1/2 of the parables recounted by Matthew)
- 1 is unique to Mark³²

³¹ This is the parable of the watchful servants.

³² The only parable distinct to Mark is that of the growing seed (6:26-29). This parable serves to illustrate two unique Markan view (both the mystery of the growth and the immediacy of action), as follows: "The

- 15 are found only in Luke (more than 1/2 of the Lukan parables)

Also of note is the sequence of the parables. The 7 parables that Mark has in common with Matthew are recounted in the same exact order as they are presented in Matthew. In contrast, while Matthew and Luke have 12 parables in common, there is no commonality to their order of presentation.

While the Gospel of John does not make use of the parable format found in the three synoptics, John does make use of an analogy format that is more personalized. Rather than tell a story about some third party to illustrate a point about the kingdom of heaven, John has Jesus declaring himself by way of similar visual imagery.

An example is: "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."³³ Another example: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life."³⁴

Yet another example gets as close to a parable as can be found in John's gospel:

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away -- and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.³⁵

James & Paul: James generally feels no need to make his point by use of finally drawn parables. However, James does use the vehicle of illustration to help make some points. For example, James offers a horse's bit and a ship's rudder as two different metaphors of the importance for controlling one's speech (or tongue).³⁶

Similarly, in his writings Paul makes virtually no use of parables as a method of illustrating his theology. Nor does Paul even refer to any of Jesus' parables.

Non-Canonical Gospels: Of the non-canonical gospels, only the Gospel of Thomas follows in the parabolic tradition. Out of 114 chapters containing separate sayings, at

kingdom of god is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come."

³³ John 6:51.

³⁴ John 8:12.

³⁵ John 10:11-16.

³⁶ James 3:3-5.

least 13 involve use of the distinctive parable format. The first occurs in Thomas 8 which opens very much in the style of a synoptic parable: “The human one is *like* a wise fisherman...”

Parables in Thomas

| Parable in Thomas | Parallels in Synoptics |
|---|---|
| “The human one is like a wise fisherman who cast his net into the sea and drew it up from the sea full of little fish. Among them the wise fisherman discovered a fine large fish. He threw all the little fish back into the sea, and easily chose the large fish.” (8:1-3) | Matthew 13:47-50 (parable of the net) |
| “Look, the sower went out, took a handful (of seeds), and scattered (them). Some fell on the road, and the birds came and gathered them. Others fell on rock, and they didn’t take root in the soil and didn’t produce heads of grain. Others fell on thorns, and the choked the seeds and worms ate them. And others fell on good soil, and it produced a good crop: it yielded sixty per measure and one hundred twenty per measure.” (9:1-5) | Matthew 13:3-9, Mark 4:2-9, Luke 8:4-8 (parable of sower and soils) |
| “It (Heaven’s imperial rule) is like a mustard seed. <It’s> the smallest of all seeds, but when it falls on prepared soil, it produces a large branch and becomes a shelter for birds of the sky.” (20:2-4) | Matthew 13:31-32, Mark 4:30-32, Luke 13:18-19 (parable of mustard seed) |
| “They (the disciples) are like little children living in a field that is not theirs. When the owners of the field come, they will say, “Give us back our field.” They take off their clothes in front of them in order to give it back to them, and they return their field to them.” (21:2-4) ³⁷ | -- |
| “The Father’s imperial rule is like a person who had [good] seed. His enemy came during the night and sowed weeds among the good seed. The person did not let the workers pull up the weeds, but said to them, ‘No, otherwise you might go to pull up the weeds and pull up the wheat along with them.’ For on the day of the harvest the weeds will be conspicuous, and will be pulled up and burned.” (57) | Matthew 13:24-30 (parable of the weeds) |
| “There was a rich man who had a great deal of money. He said, ‘I shall invest my money so that I may sow, reap, plant, and fill my storehouses with produce, that I may lack nothing.’ These were the things he was thinking in his heart, but on that very night he died.” (63:1-3) | Luke 12:16-21 (parable of the rich fool) |
| “Someone was receiving guests. When he had prepared the dinner, he sent his slave to invite the guests. ... The master said to his slave, ‘Go out on the streets and bring back whomever you find to have dinner.’ (64:1-11) | Matthew 22:1-10, Luke 14:16-24 (parable of the wedding banquet) |
| “A [...] person owned a vineyard and rented it to some farmers ... Then the master sent his son and said, ‘Perhaps they’ll show my son some respect.’ Because the farmers knew that he was the heir to the vineyard, they grabbed him and killed him.” (65:1-7) | Matthew 21:33-41, Mark 12:1-9, Luke 20:9-16 (parable of the tenants) |
| “The Father’s imperial rule is like a merchant who had a supply of merchandise and then found a pearl. That merchant was prudent; he sold the merchandise and bought the single pearl for himself.” (76:1-2) | Matthew 13:44-46 (parable of the valuable pearl) |
| “The Father’s imperial rule is like [a] woman who took a little leaven, [hid] it in dough, and made it into large loaves of bread.” (96:1-2) | Matthew 13:33, Luke 13:20-21 (parable of the yeast) |
| “The Father’s imperial rule is like a person who wanted to kill someone powerful. While still at home he drew his sword and thrust it into the wall to | -- |

³⁷ This parable is given in response to a question from Mary, who asks: “What are your disciples like?”

| Parable in Thomas | Parallels in Synoptics |
|---|--|
| find out whether his had would go in. Then he killed the powerful one.” (98) | |
| “The <Father’s> imperial rule is like a shepherd who had a hundred sheep. One of them, the largest, went astray. He left the ninety-nine and looked for the one until he found it. After he had toiled, he said to the sheep, ‘I love you more than the ninety-nine.’ “ (107) | Matthew 18:12-14, Luke 15:4-7 (parable of the lost sheep) |
| “The <Father’s> imperial rule is like a person who had a treasure hidden in his field but did not know it. And [when] he died he left it to his [son]. The son [did] not know <about it either>. He took over the field and sold it. The buyer went plowing, [discovered] the treasure, and began to lend money at interest to whomever he wished.” (109) | Matthew 13:44 (parable of the hidden treasure) |

Of the 13 parables listed, all but two are also found in one or more of the synoptics. It is noted that 4 are paralleled only by Matthew; one is found only in Luke.

Over one-half (7 of 13) parables found in Thomas start with: “The Father’s imperial rule (or kingdom) ... ”

Not surprisingly, Thomas often offers a somewhat different twist compared to the way a parable is recounted by the synoptics. For example, in the parable of the lost sheep, only Thomas has the shepherd saying: “I love you more than the ninety-nine.”

In a number of the other sayings compiled by Thomas, Jesus may not use the parable format but will use an example to illustrate his point. This approach is exemplified by the saying (in Thomas 40) wherein Jesus said: “A grapevine has been planted apart from the Father. Since it is not strong, it will be pulled up by its root and will perish.”

Parables in Summary: When it comes to the parables of Jesus, we reach a clear fork in the road. For the New Testament gospel writers of Matthew, Mark and Luke as well as the non-canonical gospel of Thomas, parables are integral to the Jesus message. For John, Paul and the non-canonical gospel writers (other than Thomas) there is virtually no mention of parables. James is somewhere in-between, not using the method of parable but nonetheless resorting to similar literary devices of illustration and analogy.

Why the divergence? Did John and Paul feel like others had done a decent job of telling these stories, so leave well enough alone? Were they unaware of or disinterested in the messages conveyed in parables? Could they convey the Jesus message better without parables?

We don’t know the answer to these or other similar questions. We are left to speculate. But make no mistake. For those who follow the parabolic tradition, the message of Jesus is both situational and highly nuanced. We are left to seek and find on our own.

For those who follow the more linear path, especially that of Paul, the message becomes direct and prescriptive. The message of salvation is more formulaic. Follow the steps (of faith and rebirth) and secure the keys to heaven.

5. Death

If New Testament gospel writers were split in their interest of Jesus birth, they are united in their view of the importance of his death. This is a topic of considerable importance for other New Testament books as well, particularly the epistles of Paul. And Jesus' death is described by some, though not all of the non-canonical gospels reviewed.

Gospel Accounts: Among the most reported events of various gospel writers is the passion and death of Jesus. All four gospels of the New Testament provide accounts both of death and ensuing resurrection.

There is consistency regarding a number of the details. This sequence of events is reported in common by all four gospel writers:

- Last gathering of Jesus and disciples with meal and instruction
- Peter's denial foretold
- Visit to garden/Mount of Olives
- Betrayal and arrest
- Cutting the ear of the high priest's slave
- Audience with the high priest(s) and denial by Peter
- Transfer to Pilate
- Pilate offers Barabbas
- Pilate's authorization of crucifixion
- Inscription on cross as "King of the Jews"
- Crucifixion with two others

There are also differences in details between the gospel accounts. Some of the more significant differences noted are between the three synoptics and John. For example, all three synoptics record the last supper, carrying of the cross by Simon the Cyrene, darkness from noon to 3 p.m. and tearing of the temple veil in two when Jesus dies.

John records none of these events. Perhaps most significantly, his account of a last gathering with the disciples appears to take place before rather than during the Passover.

Each gospel writer provides details unique to that particular account. For example, only Matthew reports Judas repentance and self-inflicted hanging. Matthew also is tagged with what has been interpreted over the centuries as an anti-Semitic imprimatur, i.e. the response of the crowd to Pilate that "His blood be on us and on our children!"³⁸

Only Mark provides the distinctive aside during the arrest of Jesus that "A certain young man was following him, wearing nothing but a linen cloth. They caught hold of him, but he left the linen cloth and ran off naked."³⁹

³⁸ Matthew 27:25.

³⁹ Mark 14:51-52. This aside has an unusual parallel in the controversial Secret Garden of Mark, where later in the evening after the raising of Lazarus, a young man comes to Jesus "dressed only in a linen cloth." (Secret Gospel of Mark 1:11).

Luke is the only gospel suggesting that the priests transferred Jesus to Herod before removal to Pilate's jurisdiction. Only Luke describes the repentance of one of the criminals crucified with Jesus. And of the four gospel writers, only Luke fails to note that Jesus was given sour wine to drink on the cross.

John is distinctive in the request by Jesus for John to look after Jesus' mother. John also is the only gospel writer who reports the piercing of Jesus' side (after death) by sword of a Roman soldier.

Perhaps the most noteworthy departure that John makes from the other synoptics is with the timing he attributes to Jesus cleansing of the temple. The synoptics all place this event at the beginning of passion week, within a day of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. John places the event at a much earlier Passover, effectively at the beginning rather than the end of Jesus' ministry (at least as recorded in Chapter 2 of the John's gospel).

One of the more interesting differences lies in the differing accounts of Jesus last words. Matthew and Mark come close, but without indicating what was said. Luke and John clearly differ in their accounts:

Matthew: "Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last."

Mark: "Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last."

Luke: "Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, 'Father into your hands I commend my spirit.' Having said this, he breathed his last."

John: "When Jesus had received the wine, he said, 'It is finished.' Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit."

James & Paul: James appears to employ the imagery of death as a key metaphor in his epistle -- for a purpose that proves to be diametrically opposed to the viewpoint of Paul. To drive home the view regarding the primacy of works over faith, James states that: "For just as the a body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead."⁴⁰ The book ends on a more literal but similar note: "you should know that whoever brings back a sinner from wandering will save the sinner's soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins."⁴¹ Yet despite the importance of the topic, James nowhere discusses the death of Jesus.

The events associated with Jesus death and ensuing resurrection are the only historical items regarding Jesus' earthly sojourn referenced in the writings of Paul. The only event from Jesus' life that Paul describes with some detail is the last supper.

Paul's account closely parallels those of the three synoptics; however, Paul goes out of his way not to cite them as the source. In prefacing his version of the last supper, Paul

⁴⁰ James 3:26.

⁴¹ James 5:20.

states: “For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed....”⁴²

As with Jesus’ birth, Paul finds a primarily theological significance to Jesus death. In Romans, Paul explains that Jesus “was handed over to death for our trespasses....”⁴³ And in Galatians, Paul graphically drives home the viewpoint that both Jews and Gentiles are justified through Christ’s death:

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’ – in order that in Christ Jesus, the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.⁴⁴

Non-Canonical Gospels: Of the non-canonical gospels, the sayings in the Gospel of Thomas contain no clear reference to Jesus death. The closest Thomas comes occurs when the disciples ask who will be their leader after Jesus leaves.⁴⁵

However, for two other non-canonical works, the death of Jesus is central to the story. The Secret Book of James refers to sayings made by Jesus “five hundred fifty days after he rose from the dead....” And James offers perhaps more direct support for today’s salvation path of evangelical Christians than even the New Testament gospels with statements such as: “Remember my cross and my death and you will live!”; and “I swear to you, none will be saved unless they believe in my cross....”⁴⁶

The Gospel of Peter is written around the events of Jesus passion. A number of details parallel those of New Testament accounts; some do not. Joseph of Arimathea appears to request the right to bury Jesus even before the execution. Joseph is portrayed as a friend of both the Roman procurator Pontius Pilate and Jesus. This gospel also indicates that the elders and the priests experienced some remorse for the evil they had done.

Jesus’ Death Summarized: The passion and death of Jesus are central to all four New Testament gospels and to the writings of Paul. For Paul, Jesus death was the message. After all, it was Paul who wrote, “... we proclaim Christ crucified.”⁴⁷

Conversely, Jesus’ death is not a topic of discussion for either the New Testament epistle of James or the non-canonical Gospel of Thomas – though this death does figure in other

⁴² I Corinthians 11:23. It has been debated as to whether Paul means that he received this message from Jesus directly (as by way of a vision), or by way of the church’s liturgical tradition. At any rate, it is interesting that Paul feels the need for this type of introduction, rather than either not commenting or attributing the account to the original sources.

⁴³ Romans 4:25.

⁴⁴ Galatians 3:13-14.

⁴⁵ Thomas 12.

⁴⁶ Quotations are from the Secret Book of James 2:3, 4:11 and 5:2, respectively.

⁴⁷ I Corinthians 1:23.

non-canonical gospels. On balance, it would be hard to imagine an historically authentic Christianity that did not continue to recognize the passion and death of one Jesus of Nazareth.

6. Resurrection

As with Jesus' death, the topic of resurrection is central to the four New Testament gospels as well as to the Christology later articulated so forcefully by Paul the apostle. Resurrection also constitutes an important theme for several non-canonical gospels. However, the resurrection accounts are far more divergent in the details offered than is the case with reporting of Jesus' death.

Gospel Accounts: A comparison of resurrection accounts provided by the four gospel writers of the canon is provided by the following chart.

Comparison of Gospel Resurrection Accounts

| Matthew | Mark | Luke | John |
|---|--|---|--|
| Mary Magdalene, other Mary go to tomb | Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James and Salome go to tomb | Women go to tomb with spices | Mary Magdalene goes to tomb |
| Angel rolls back stone | Stone is already rolled away | Stone is already rolled away | Mary returns, brings Peter & John to tomb |
| Angel speaks to women | Angel speaks to women | Two angels speak to women | Disciples return home; Jesus appears to Mary |
| Jesus meets women | Women flee from tomb | Apostles do not believe Mary Magdalene, Johanna, Mary mother of James & other women | Jesus appears to disciples that same day |
| Priests & elders set resurrection <i>spin</i> | <u>Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene</u> | Jesus meets two men on road to Emmaus | Jesus reappears to disciples with Thomas one week later |
| Jesus meets disciples in Galilee | <u>Disciples do not believe Mary</u> | Jesus appears to disciples; they touch him | Jesus appears to disciples in Galilee; provides fish & bread |
| Great commission is given | <u>Jesus appears to two disciples walking in the country</u> | Great commission is given | Jesus instructs Peter to "feed my sheep" three times |
| | <u>Jesus appears to disciples "at the table"</u> | Jesus ascends to heaven at Bethany | Peter asks about what will happen to John |
| | <u>Great commission is given</u> | | |
| | <u>Jesus ascends to heaven</u> | | |

Note: Items underlined are taken from Mark 16:9-20, a passage generally agreed as not contained in the earliest known manuscripts of this gospel.

Between the three synoptics, there is strong agreement as to what occurs early Sunday morning at the tomb – up to the point where the women prepare to return to spread the news to the disciples. The earliest known manuscripts of Mark actually stop at this point.

From there, the accounts of the synoptics (including later editions of Mark) take different paths.

The gospel of John starts out on a path different from the three synoptics. In John, only Mary Magdalene (rather than several women) is identified as visiting the tomb early Sunday morning. Only this gospel describes Mary then bringing Peter and John to the tomb. And only John has Jesus directly appearing to Mary alone.

The synoptics converge again at the end of their gospels, as each provides the great commission (and two then describe the ascension). Only John does not mention either the great commission or the ascension. Rather, John ends with Peter asking what will happen in the future to John. Jesus reply is to state: "...what is that to you? Follow me." The book ends with John asserting he is the disciple who has written this particular gospel and "that there are many other things that Jesus did..."⁴⁸

James & Paul: In James, the topic of both Jesus death and resurrection is notable only by its absence. Given the emphasis of this letter on the importance of good works rather than faith, this omission is not surprising.

Resurrection is a topic of far greater importance for the apostle Paul. In one instance, Paul provides details of the historical events associated with the period from resurrection to ascension. To the Corinthians, Paul writes:

...that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.⁴⁹

Again, Paul's references to the resurrection event are exclusively for theological purposes. In Romans, Paul had written that Jesus "was handed over to death for our trespasses..." He concludes the thought by stating "...and he was raised for our justification."⁵⁰

It is noteworthy that Paul's letter to the Galatians provides the rationale for justification by faith with extensive discussion of Christ's death, but no reference to his subsequent resurrection. However, Paul also applies the resurrection motif in other letters, particularly I Corinthians, where he pointedly asks: "Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead?" Paul

⁴⁸ From John 21:22,25.

⁴⁹ I Corinthians 15:3-8.

⁵⁰ Romans 4:25.

goes on to exclaim that "...if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain."⁵¹

Other New Testament Accounts: The Acts of the Apostles begins with another account of Jesus giving the great commission and then ascending to heaven. Added is the detail mentioned nowhere else that upon ascension, two angels appear to remind those present that: "This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."⁵²

Non-Canonical Gospels: Specific references to Jesus' resurrection also are relatively sparse in the non-canonical gospel literature. There is no mention of this topic either directly or indirectly in the Gospel of Thomas.

Elsewhere, Jesus' resurrection gets play only in the Secret Gospel of James and the Gospel of Peter. The teachings of Jesus in Secret James occur exclusively with regard to what is reported to be a period of over 550 days from his resurrection. When Jesus reaches the end of this supplemental teaching period, he states: "This is all I shall tell you at this time. Now I shall ascend to the place from which I have come...For today I must take my place at the right hand of my Father."⁵³

The Gospel of Peter offers a resurrection that parallels that of Mark, but with some unusual details. As with Mark, Peter's version has Mary of Magdala together with "her friends" approaching the tomb, but for the purpose of performing the rite of beating their breasts. This was not done at the time of crucifixion; even at the tomb, concern is expressed: "We fear that someone might see us."⁵⁴

Also like the early manuscripts of Mark, Secret James includes a visit from an angel and the women then fleeing the tomb "in fear". Unlike Mark, Secret James then ends with the disciples returning to their homes since the Passover feast was now over, with the last words: "But I, Simon Peter, and Andrew, my brother, took our fishing nets and went away to the sea. And with us was Levi, the son of Alphaeus, whom the Lord..."⁵⁵

Resurrection Summarized: Like Jesus death, the resurrection story is important for all four gospel writers plus Paul. It is not mentioned by either James or Thomas.

The resurrection is clearly integral to the historical Jesus. However, beyond this central point, there is considerable variation in the details of what happened that Sunday morning – as well as when and how. The confusion is largely related to the involvement of the women who first visited the tomb and their later interaction with the male disciples.

⁵¹ I Corinthians 15:12,14.

⁵² Acts 1:11.

⁵³ Secret James, 9:7, 11.

⁵⁴ Gospel of Peter 12:5.

⁵⁵ Gospel of Peter 14:3. Here in mid-sentence, the available manuscript for the Gospel of Peter abruptly ends.

This apparent confusion between gospel writers is indicative of to handle the critical role of women in launching Christianity. But that's another story – to which we return as the last chapter in this manuscript.

Content & Viewpoints

This review of the structure of various Jesus stories is important, in large part, to set a foundation for the discussion which now follows regarding the theological content and viewpoints expressed by the gospels – both those found in the New Testament canon and those outside.

A series of 18 themes pertinent to Christianity both then and now are explored. These topics are listed alphabetically to include:

| | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|
| Charity | Heaven | Prophecy Projected |
| Disciples | Hell | Salvation |
| Divinity of Jesus | Kingdom of God Now | Social Revolution |
| Economic of Redistribution | Message Ambivalence | Torah Law |
| Eschatology | Messiah | Wisdom & Word |
| Gentiles | Prophecy Historicized | Women |

Alphabetically, we begin with charity.

7. *Charity*

The word “charity” is often used in the New Testament, particularly the King James (KJ) version, as a now somewhat antiquated term for love. The intent here is to consider the term in its more modern context – that of concern for the poor and underprivileged in society.

Gospel Accounts: Of the four New Testament gospels, Luke’s version stands out for its distinctive role in conveying a message of priority of God’s kingdom for the poor. The other three gospels carry a decidedly different slant.

Perhaps the best illustration is provided by contrasting messages of Luke and Matthew in the following beatitude:

Luke 6:20 -- Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

Matthew 5:3 -- Blessed are the poor *in spirit*, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Another comparison:

Luke 6:21-- Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled.

Matthew 5:6 – Blessed are those who hunger and thirst *for righteousness*, for they will be filled.

All together, Luke’s version of the beatitudes comprises only four sayings, while Matthew comprises a total of 9 beatitudes. Then, following the positive affirmations,

Luke (6:24-26, NRSV) issues four condemnations which have no counterpart in Matthew:

But woe to you who are *rich*, for you have received your consolation.

Woe to you who are *full now*, for you will be hungry.

Woe to you who are *laughing now*, for you will mourn and weep.

Woe to you when all *speak well* of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.⁵⁶

Each of these denunciations appears directly aimed at the “haves” of first century Jewish society.

Luke shares a few accounts of helping the poor with the other synoptic writers. For example, all three writers tell the story of Jesus advising the ruler to “sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor” to inherit eternal life.⁵⁷ And both Luke and Mark recount the event of the widows mite, followed by Jesus comment: “...for all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on.”⁵⁸

Overall, Luke clearly places distinctive emphasis on righting social and economic inequities. This Lukan priority comes through in a variety of other events and sayings. These have no counterpart in the other gospels, as indicated by the following summary listing:

In Nazareth, Jesus reads Isaiah in the synagogue: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.” (Luke 4:18)

To an inquiry from disciples of John the Baptist, Jesus replies: “go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them.” (7:22)

In response to a lawyer who asks what he must do to inherit eternal life, Jesus tells the parable of the good Samaritan – the only one to render aid. (10:30-37)

⁵⁶ The Scholars Version provides an even more direct, contemporary version of these denunciations, beginning with: “Damn you rich! You already have your consolation.” (6:24)

⁵⁷ These parallel accounts of the ruler are provided in Matthew 19:16-30, Mark 10:17-31 and Luke 18:18-29. All three include the comment that it “is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” (Luke 18:25, NRSV)

⁵⁸ Luke 21:4, NRSV.

Jesus relates the parable of the rich man whose life is taken after building bigger barns to illustrate the moral: “Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.” (12:15-21)

To his disciples, Jesus discusses the need to “not worry about your life.” (12:22) He further directs: “Sell your possessions, and give alms.” (12:33)

Jesus tells the story of “the rich man” and the “poor man named Lazarus”. In Hades, the rich man asks Abraham for mercy. Abraham’s matter-of-fact response: “Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony.” (16:25)

Jesus spots Zacchaeus in a tree, and invites himself to the home of Zacchaeus, who there proclaims: “Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor....” Jesus responds: “Today salvation has come to this house....” (19:8-9)

Perhaps most telling are the accounts provided by the four gospel writers of a woman (or separate women) anointing Jesus. In the versions provided by Matthew, Mark and John, the anointing takes place at Bethany. There are complaints that the ointment could have been sold and the money given to the poor. Both the incident and the response by Jesus are remarkably consistent:

Matthew: “For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me (26:11)

Mark: “For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me.” (13:7)

John: “You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.” (12:8)

Luke takes a different tack. An anointing takes place in a Pharisee’s house (unspecified location) by “a woman in the city, who was a sinner”. The Pharisee says to himself: “If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him – that she is a sinner.” Jesus speaks up with a parable of two debtors, then gets to the point: “Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, forgives little.” He then says to the woman: “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”⁵⁹

Whether or not Jesus was the beneficiary of one or two anointings during the course of his ministry is immaterial. Three of the gospel writers (including John) have picked a story where the punch line suggests that a luxury gift for a special occasion may be a more important priority than helping the poor (at least in this instance). Despite his

⁵⁹ Excerpted from Luke 7:37-50.

normal approach of using material in common with Matthew and Mark, Luke here selects a seemingly similar account (albeit in a different setting), and with the emphasis shifted from economics to forgiveness.

James & Paul: Charity toward the poor takes on a form more familiar to capitalist economics when, years later, Paul makes his last visit to Jerusalem. Before the Roman governor Felix, Paul explains that: “After an absence of several years, I came to Jerusalem to bring my people gifts for the poor and to present offerings”⁶⁰

His letter to the Romans, written before Paul’s trip to Jerusalem suggests that this was a priority of some importance. Paul explains: “At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem in a ministry to the saints; for Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to share their resources with the poor among the saints at Jerusalem.” Paul goes further, saying “...if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material things.”⁶¹

His efforts in Macedonia are referred to again in the second letter to the Corinthians. Though the church at Jerusalem is never explicitly identified, it appears to be indirectly referenced.⁶²

Apparently, the Macedonian churches had been giving even out of “their extreme poverty,” but had then fallen lax. So Paul “urged Titus, as he had earlier made a beginning, so he should also complete this generous undertaking (i.e. giving) among you.”⁶³

Paul makes it clear that he is not commanding the gift; he asks that it be rendered “as a voluntary gift and not an extortion.” Those who give will reap rewards for “God loves a cheerful giver.”⁶⁴

Paul also refers to this collection in his letter to the Galatians, outlining the agreement that had occurred much earlier with James, Peter and John – allowing Paul to go the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. The condition: “They asked only one thing, that we remember the poor, which was actually what I was eager to do.”⁶⁵

However, the sincerity of Paul’s stated eagerness is open to question. To see this, we go back to the separate account (by Luke?) in the book of Acts.

⁶⁰ Acts 24:17, NIV. The NRSV translation reads: “Now after some years I came to bring alms to my nation and to offer sacrifices.” This is the only explicit reference in Acts to the collection that was undertaken by Paul, as also evidenced by his later epistles.

⁶¹ Romans 15:25-27.

⁶² II Corinthians 8, 9.

⁶³ II Corinthians 8:1,6.

⁶⁴ II Corinthians 9:5,7.

⁶⁵ Galatians 2:10.

In his trip to bring an offering for the poor, Paul was again accused by Jerusalem elders of the church that “you teach all the Jews living among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, and that you tell them not to circumcise their children or observe the customs.”⁶⁶ To appease the critics, Paul agrees to undergo rites of purification.

The evidence indicates that, when in Jerusalem, Paul went out of his way to appease the church elders -- whether in matters related to the issue of adherence to Jewish customs or offerings to the poor. When he was on the road elsewhere, Paul’s priorities were something else.

Certainly, with the notable exceptions of the verses cited, Paul’s epistles otherwise provide little evidence of any emphasis on addressing needs of the poor. Rather, the evidence available suggests that Paul takes a middle of the road position -- somewhere between Luke and Matthew.

For Paul, riches and poverty are of little consequence. Paul writes that Christians are treated “as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.”⁶⁷ Later, he goes on to extend to comparison to Jesus: “...that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.”⁶⁸

Paul seems to be saying that charity is important, but not necessarily the most important priority for Christianity. In his first letter to the Corinthians, he writes: “If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.”

However, Paul’s true feelings about not rewarding sloth are again evidenced by his epistle to the Thessalonians:

Now we command you, beloved, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to keep away from believers who are living in idleness and not according to the tradition that they received from us. For you yourselves ought to imitate us; we were not idle when we were with you, and we did not eat anyone’s bread without paying for it; but with toil and labor we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you. This was not because we do not have that right, but in order to give you an example to imitate. For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: *Anyone unwilling to work should not eat.*”⁶⁹

Within the early church, the titular leader of the church in Jerusalem may have disputed Paul’s voice of moderation. That this could have been an *on-going* issue of some debate in the early church is suggested by James return to Luke’s early vision of addressing needs of the poor. James message could hardly be more direct:

⁶⁶ Acts 21:21.

⁶⁷ 2 Corinthians 6:10.

⁶⁸ 2 Corinthians 8:9.

⁶⁹ II Thessalonians 3:6-10.

“My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, ‘Have a seat here, please,’ while to the one who is poor you say, ‘Stand there,’ or ‘sit at my feet,’ have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not *God chosen the poor* in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court? Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you?”⁷⁰

Other New Testament Accounts: For Luke, the emphasis on charity surfaces again early in Acts, but then fades somewhat as the church experiences a transition in leadership from the original disciples to one apostle, Paul. Luke suggests that, early on, a primitive form of communism was experienced: “All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all.”⁷¹

Non-Canonical Gospels: The debate does not end here, but resonates again in the non-canonical gospels of Thomas and the Nazoreans. On this matter, both of these non-canonical gospels clearly weigh in on the side of Luke and James. For example, Thomas includes this version of the beatitude: “Congratulations to the poor, for to you belongs heaven’s domain.”⁷²

Thomas also sketches a parable similar to Luke’s account of the rich man and his bigger barns, but in Thomas the rich man dies *for even thinking* about plans for expansion, well before taking action. And in Thomas, the parable ends with Jesus exclaiming: “Anyone here with two ears had better listen.”⁷³

Finally, Thomas also quotes Jesus as saying: “If you have money, don’t lend it at interest. Rather, give [it] to someone from whom you won’t get it back,”⁷⁴

The Gospel of the Nazoreans retells the account (found in the three synoptics) of the rich man who wants to know how to live. When the rich man balks (actually begins to “scratch his head”) at Jesus request to sell everything and give to the poor, the Nazoreans’ Jesus goes on to say: “How can you say that you follow the Law and the Prophets? In the Law it says: ‘Love you neighbor as yourself.’ Look around you: many of your brothers and sisters, sons and daughters of Abraham, are living in filth and dying of

⁷⁰ James 2:1-7.

⁷¹ Acts 2:44-45.

⁷² Thomas 54. This is the only beatitude cited in the Gospel of Thomas.

⁷³ Thomas 63.

⁷⁴ Thomas 95.

hunger. Your house is full of good things and not a thing of yours manages to get out to them.”⁷⁵

Charity Summarized: The separation between Christians who place priority emphasis on serving the poor and underprivileged in society versus those emphasizing a personal relationship with the divine is as old as the church itself. On the side of charity are James as titular leader of the early church, the gospel writer Luke and perhaps Thomas the enigmatic disciple.

On the side of emphasizing personal rather than social responsibility are the other three gospel writers. Somewhere in the middle – perhaps for political reasons -- is Paul, though for Paul charity clearly represents a sideline rather than a focal point of his ministry.

8. Disciples

Jesus’ relationship with the twelve men that spent perhaps three years traveling with the master is of considerable interest, especially because both the gospel and other accounts provide very different views of this relationship.

Gospel Accounts: We start with Mark, who paints what might be considered as the most negative portrait.

The following chart chronicles 24 incidents involving some action of one or more disciples, followed by a response from Jesus. In only one instance (the first) does Jesus respond to a disciple’s actions in a wholly agreeable manner.

Interestingly, this positive response is to Peter, who generally comes in for more than his fair share of criticism. This first incident also occurs before the selection of all 12 disciples.

| The Incident/Actions of Disciples | Jesus’ Response to the Disciple(s) |
|---|--|
| Simon & companions search for Jesus, letting him know that people are looking for Jesus | Jesus answers: “Let us go on the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also, for that is what I came out to do.” (1:38) |
| Disciples ask for meaning of parables, specifically the Parable of the Sower. | “Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand all the parables?” (4:13) |
| Jesus is awakened in the midst of a storm while boating across the Sea of Galilee. | “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?” (4:40) |
| Disciples let Jesus know there is no food for the crowd. | First response: “You give them something to eat.” (6:37) |
| Jesus walks on water; disciples are terrified. | “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.” (6:50). This is followed by Mark’s editorial note in verses 51-52: “And they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.” |
| Disciples ask Jesus about his criticism of Pharisees | “Then do you also fail to understand?” (7:18) |

⁷⁵ Nazoreans 6:3-4.

| The Incident/Actions of Disciples | Jesus' Response to the Disciple(s) |
|--|---|
| over eating with defiled, unwashed hands. | |
| Disciples forget to bring bread and had only one loaf in the boat. Jesus cautions to beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Herod. The disciples comment to each other: "It is because we have no bread." (8:16) | "Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you have ears, and fail to hear? And do you not remember? ... Do you not yet understand?" (8:17-21) |
| Jesus questions, "Who do people say that I am?" The disciples say John the Baptist, Elijah, prophets, others. | Jesus orders them to tell no one about him. (8:30) |
| Peter rebukes Jesus for Jesus predicting his own death. | Jesus to Peter: "Get behind me Satan!" (8:33) |
| From a crowd, someone complains that the disciples are unable to cast out a spirit. | "You faithless generation, how much longer must I put up with you?" (9:19) |
| The disciples ask Jesus privately why they cannot cast out the spirit. | "This kind can come out only with prayer." (9:29) |
| Jesus forecasts his own death and resurrection. The disciples "did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him." (9:32) | -- |
| Disciples argue as to whom among them is the greatest. | "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." (9:35) |
| John relays that the disciples tried to stop someone else casting out demons in Jesus name. | "Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. Whoever is not against us is for us." (9:39-40) |
| Disciples speak sternly to parents bringing children to Jesus. | "But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, 'Let the little children come to me; do not stop them....' (10:14) |
| In response to Jesus' assertion that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for the rich to enter heaven, the disciples ask: "Then who can be saved? (10:26) | "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible." (10:27) |
| James and John ask to be seated at the right and left hands of Jesus in glory. | "You do not know what you are asking." (10:38) |
| The other 10 disciples are angry with James and John. | "...whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant..." (10:44) |
| Peter reminds Jesus that the fig tree Jesus cursed has withered. | "Have faith in God. (11:22) |
| A disciple remarks on the large size of the stones and buildings at the temple. | "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down." (13:2) |
| On the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew ask when the destruction of the temple will occur. | "Beware that no one leads you astray." (13:5) |
| The disciples ask who will betray Jesus. | "...woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born." (14:21) |
| Peter says he will not desert. | "Truly I tell you, this day, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times." (14:30) |
| Peter, James and John can not remain awake while Jesus prays at Gethsemane. | "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour? (14:37) |

Mark is also interesting because the only persons noted as being present at Jesus' crucifixion are several women who "used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee."⁷⁶ No mention is made of the disciples' presence at the cross.

Similarly, the only persons that Mark describes as going to the tomb on Easter Sunday are the same three women who were at the crucifixion (Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome).

The degree to which Mark puts a negative *spin* on the disciples is even more readily apparent when the accounts of Mark are compared with those of the other gospel writers. Perhaps the best example is provided by Jesus' rebuke of Peter.⁷⁷ Neither Matthew nor Luke describe this incident, though both of the other synoptics provide the sequel (also contained in Mark) about the need to lose one's life for Jesus sake in order to find it.⁷⁸

Matthew and/or Luke also cover virtually all of the 23 incidents noted by the chart above. In several instances, the other two gospel writers largely agree with Mark -- also criticizing the disciples involved.

An example is the disciples inability to cast out spirits, followed by the comment: "You faithless *and perverse* generation..." Matthew and Luke actually provide a harsher rebuke to the disciples compared to Mark, with the added words of the other two gospel writers noted in *italics*.

However, there are several key incidents where the accounts of Matthew or Luke outline a more positive view of the disciples than does Mark. A noteworthy example is provided by Jesus response to the disciples for a private interpretation of the Parable of the Sower:

Mark: "Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand all the parables?" (4:13)

Matthew: "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given." (13:11)

Luke: "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God; but to others I speak in parables...." (8:10)

In other words, while Mark's Jesus is critical of the disciples' question, Matthew and Luke portray a Jesus who is pleased to share secrets with his select dozen.

⁷⁶ Mark 15:41.

⁷⁷ Mark 8:33.

⁷⁸ The parallels to Mark 8:35 are provided by Matthew 10:39, more indirectly by Luke 14:33, and more directly by John 12:25.

A second example is provided by Jesus walk on the water. In all three synoptics, Jesus is reported as telling the disciples not to be afraid. Only Mark can't resist an aside that the disciples, in effect, still don't get it.

Jesus' response to the children and their parents is a third example. All three synoptics have Jesus asking the children to come to him; only Mark also indicates that Jesus was indignant with the disciples for trying to keep the children and their parents away.

James & Paul: James was not one of the 12 original disciples though he was Jesus' brother. His brief epistle does not provide any commentary on the relationship of Jesus and the original twelve.

However, despite the early resistance of James and other family members to Jesus' teaching, it is clear that he becomes closely aligned with disciples such as Peter and John by the time of the early church. This relationship is illustrated by Paul's lumping the three of them together as "acknowledged pillars" of the Jerusalem church.⁷⁹

The apostle Paul does not provide any commentary as to Jesus' view of the disciples. However, Paul is not hesitant to make his own views known.

Luke's account in the Acts glosses over the disagreements between Paul and leaders of the Jerusalem church. Paul offers a considerably more blunt assessment in his letter to the Galatians, stating of his visit to Jerusalem: "...we did not submit to them even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might always remain with you."⁸⁰

Paul then goes on to state that, later when Peter visited Antioch: "I opposed him to his face, because he stood self-condemned."⁸¹

Non-Canonical Gospels: The gospels outside the New Testament canon also provide noteworthy glimpses into the relationship between Jesus and individual disciples. In the Gospel of Thomas, the disciples raise the question of who will be their leader when Jesus leaves. Jesus' response: "No matter where you are, you are to go to James the Just, for whose sake heaven and earth came into being."⁸²

In the next chapter, the stated writer is put into a unique position vis-à-vis the other disciples when Jesus purportedly shares three sayings with Thomas alone. When the others question Thomas, he responds: "If I tell you one of the sayings he spoke to me, you will pick up rocks and stone me, and fire will come from the rocks and destroy you."⁸³

⁷⁹ Galatians 2:9.

⁸⁰ Galatians 2:5.

⁸¹ Galatians 2:11.

⁸² Thomas 12:2.

⁸³ Thomas 13:8.

In Thomas 21, Mary asks Jesus: “What are your disciples like?” The response: “They are like little children living in a field that is not theirs.”

And in Thomas 43, the disciples ask: “Who are you to say these things to us?” To a pointed question, Jesus response is even more critical: “You don’t understand who I am from what I say to you. Rather, you have become like the Judeans, for they love the tree but hate its fruit, or they love the fruit but hate the tree.”

The Secret Book of James consists of a long dialogue between Jesus and the disciples. Peter comments: “Sometimes you urge us on toward heaven’s domain, yet at other times you urge turn us away, Lord. Sometimes you make appeals, draw us toward faith, and promise us life, yet at other times you drive us away from heaven’s domain.”⁸⁴

For whatever reason, Jesus response is to James, not Peter: “I have offered you faith many times; moreover, I have made myself known to you, James, and you have not understood me.”⁸⁵

Like Secret James, the Dialogue of the Savior provides an on-going discussion between Jesus and disciples. As with most of Secret James, virtually all of the conversation in Dialogue of the Savior is conducted in amiable fashion, with no comments of Jesus critical of his disciples.

Disciples Summarized: On this topic, the writers of the gospels part company more so than on any other topic considered to date. Mark’s gospel evidences clear disdain for Jesus’ disciples. At the other end of the spectrum is John. Somewhere in-between are Matthew and Luke.

Mark’s critical view for the initial group of 12 is augmented by similar views of the subsequent convert apostle Paul. The non-canonical gospel of Thomas also portrays a less than positive view of the original 12, save Thomas. James (not one of the original 12) also gets high marks from the Jesus of Thomas.

9. Divinity of Jesus

The question we pose is how did different gospel writers portray the divinity of Jesus? And a related question is the degree to which Jesus claims to divinity were to be widely known or be a more closely guarded secret.

Gospel Accounts: All four gospels of the New Testament canon proclaim the divinity of Jesus as a son of God. This is readily apparent, for example, early on in the voice from heaven at Jesus baptism:

Matthew: “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” (3:17)

⁸⁴ Secret James 9:1.

⁸⁵ Secret James 9:2.

Mark: “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” (1:11)

Luke: “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” (3:22)

John: “And John (the Baptist) testified, ‘I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.’” (1:32-34)

Even with Mark, who is the most cryptic of the gospel writers and most cautious about Jesus divinity, the message comes through. In addition to the introductory reference noted above, a man with an unclean spirit proclaims Jesus as the “Holy One of God.” (1:24).⁸⁶ In Mark 2:10, Jesus proclaims the authority of the “Son of Man” to forgive sins. In Mark 2:27, the Son of Man is also proclaimed “lord even of the Sabbath.”

Then Mark’s account goes remarkably silent. In Chapter 8, the Pharisees come looking for a sign from heaven, to test Jesus. Jesus gives none. Even later, after Jesus cleanses the temple and the elders ask by what authority he acts, he successfully evades the question.

Mark’s Jesus finally lets loose when he appears before the Council and the high priest asks: “Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?” Jesus answers: “I am; and ‘you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power’, and ‘coming with the clouds of heaven’”⁸⁷

If all four New Testament gospel writers agree on Jesus essential divinity, they split 3:1 on the degree to which this information was to be made public during Jesus’ lifetime. On this issue, the three synoptic writers take one position; John takes the other side.

Perhaps the key account – recorded by all three synoptics – was the question Jesus asked of his disciples: who do people say that I am? The resulting dialogue provides significant clues as to the views of the people, the disciples, the synoptic writers and Jesus. Herewith are the responses:

Matthew: “And they said, ‘Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’ He (Jesus) said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.’ And Jesus answered him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on

⁸⁶ A similar event occurs at Mark 3:11 with unclean spirits proclaiming Jesus the “Son of God.” And in Mark 5:7, the Gerasene demoniac calls Jesus the “Son of the Most High God.”

⁸⁷ Mark 14:61-62.

earth will be loosed in heaven.’ Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.” (16:14-20)

Mark: “And they answered him, ‘John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.’ He asked them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Peter answered him, ‘You are the Messiah.’ And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.” (8:27-30)

Luke: “They answered, ‘John the Baptist; but others, Elijah; and still others, that one of the ancient prophets has arisen.’ He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Peter answered, ‘The Messiah of God.’ He sternly ordered and commanded them not to tell anyone, saying, ‘The Son of Man must undergo great suffering and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.’” (9:19-21)

These three accounts are similar in the view of Jesus by the people (a prophet) and by Peter (the Messiah). In all three accounts, Jesus follows up by *ordering* the disciples not to tell anyone.

The three synoptics also offer some interesting differences. Mark’s account is the shortest, with no follow-on explanatory note from Jesus. Matthew tags on the statement by Jesus that this truth is “the rock” on which Jesus will build his church. And Luke follows on with a reason for not telling others, i.e. the need for Jesus to be killed and then raised.

Before leaving this event, it is noteworthy that the Gospel of Thomas offers its own parallel yet unique version to “compare me to something and tell me what I am like.”

Thomas: “Simon Peter said to him, ‘You are like a just angel.’ Matthew said to him, ‘You are like a wise philosopher.’ Thomas said to him, ‘Teacher, my mouth is utterly unable to say what you are like.’ Jesus said, ‘I am not your teacher. Because you have drunk, you have become intoxicated from the bubbling spring that I have tended.’ And he (Jesus) took him (Thomas), and withdrew, and spoke three sayings to him. When Thomas came back to his friends, they asked him, ‘What did Jesus say to you?’ Thomas said to them, ‘If I tell you one of the sayings he spoke to me, you will pick up rocks and stone me, and fire will come from the rocks and devour you.’” (13:2-8)

The writer of John offers no direct parallel to the question: Who do you say that I am? However, John’s gospel departs from the secrecy implied here and elsewhere by the synoptics.

In John, a variety of people are sprinkled throughout the text attest to Jesus as the Messiah or Christ. Peter’s brother Andrew (John 1:41), the Samaritan woman at the well (4:29), Peter (6:29), Jerusalemites who exhibit anti-Galilean prejudice (7:26-31), parents of a blind man healed but who are afraid to acknowledge Jesus’ role (9:22), a questioner at the Temple (10:24) and Martha of Bethany (11:27) all attest to Jesus’ divine role.

Then, there is the scene before Annas that only John records:

John: “Then the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching. Jesus answered, ‘I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said *nothing in secret*. Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said to them; they know what I said.’” (18:19-22)

Before moving to consider the assessments of James and Paul, it is useful to summarize the varying perspectives of these gospel writers. *First*, each writer puts a somewhat different twist on the importance of the question of who Jesus is or claims to be. In Thomas, the disciples are left to their own guesswork, as Jesus assures them he is not their teacher.

Matthew uses Peter’s statement as *the anchor* on which the future Christian church will be founded. Mark emphasizes the secret with a sense of fear or bewilderment not unlike that experienced later by the women at the tomb. Luke uses the occasion to directly forecast that Jesus as Messiah will be the reason for future death and resurrection. And John’s gospel does not need to even have Jesus ask the question; everyone has already figured it out.

Second, like Luke, Matthew and Mark follow their account with the shift in Jesus message to a forecast of future suffering and rejection. Only Matthew and Mark include the subsequent confrontation between Peter and Jesus with the sharp rejoinder from Jesus to: “Get behind me, Satan!”

Third, Thomas and the three synoptics each place an aura of secrecy around the question of who Jesus is (or claims to be). In Thomas, the secret is revealed by Jesus only to Thomas.

In the synoptics of the canon, the list of those in on the secret is expanded to include the disciples. For Luke, the list also includes demons (early in Jesus ministry before the disciples are called).

In John, the secret is widely shared, by disciples, women, those at the temple, a Samaritan, the sister who otherwise is criticized as too preoccupied with food preparation, and parents of a blind man. Then when Jesus is before Annas the high priest, he proclaims that there is no secrecy. Everybody already knows; just ask them.

The rationale for Jesus secrecy may be similar to his reason for speaking in parables. As Jesus said: “To you (the disciples) has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables; in order that they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand; so that they may not turn again and be forgiven.”⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Mark 4:11-13.

Finally, John's rendition of Jesus as Messiah appears to serve as a *bridge* to later and more widespread evangelization of the divinity of Christ by Paul. John makes it possible for the divinity of Christ to emerge from the secrecy of the synoptics to a more wide open (and Gentile) church welcoming all comers.

James & Paul: For James, the divinity of Jesus is not a major theme. Nonetheless, James does open his letter with this statement of faith: "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ."⁸⁹

Paul directly links Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. For example, at the outset of his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul proclaims: "God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."⁹⁰ This is the post-Jesus apostle who goes on to explain:

For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.⁹¹

In introducing Jesus to the Romans, Paul makes the link *at the outset* of the letter in this way:

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of god, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, the gospel according to his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was *declared to be Son of God* with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, ...⁹²

Non-Canonical Gospels: Like Paul, several of the non-canonical gospels also directly link Jesus to God. In the Secret Book of James, Jesus proclaims to the disciples: "For today I must take my place at the right hand of my Father."⁹³

And in the Dialogue of the Savior, Jesus offers the advice: "So when you give praise, do it this way: 'Hear us Father, as you heard your only begotten son and received him to yourself...'"⁹⁴

In the Infancy Gospel of James, the virgin Mary is informed that she will conceive "by the Lord, the Living God." The messenger of the Lord tells Mary: "...the child to be born will be called holy, son of the Most High."⁹⁵

⁸⁹ James 1:1.

⁹⁰ I Corinthians 1:9.

⁹¹ I Corinthians 1:22-24.

⁹² Romans 1:1-4.

⁹³ Secret James 9:10.

⁹⁴ Dialogue 2:1-2.

The fragmentary Gospel of Peter refers to Jesus as the “son of God,” albeit in derogatory terms as he is dragged to judgment.⁹⁶ In the Egerton gospel, people come to Jesus stating that “we know that you are [from God], since the things you do put you above all the prophets.”⁹⁷ Only the Gospel of the Ebionites appears to take direct issue with Jesus divinity, claiming that he “was not born of the God the Father, but created like one of the archangels.”⁹⁸

Divinity in Summary: All four gospels of the canon and a number (though not all) of the non-canonical gospels attest to the divinity of Christ. Jesus is referred to as the Son of God; he himself refers to God as his Father. However, there are important differences in the way in which Jesus divinity is portrayed to the world at large.

In the three synoptics (of Matthew, Mark and Luke), Jesus goes to great pains to keep his divine connections a secret. In John, everybody knows. And Paul makes Jesus divinity a central theme of his message.

10. Economy of Redistribution

A considerable body of scholarly research in the 20th century has focused on Jesus from a socio-political perspective. Less has been researched or written about Jesus’ teachings regarding matters of economics.

Broadly defined, economics addresses the question of how (scarce) resources are allocated. In the New Testament as today, a primary medium for allocation is monetary.

A 1988 book titled *The Economy of the Kingdom* focused on “an often neglected aspect, the moral understanding of social relations and economic interaction.”⁹⁹ The author, a professor at the Institute for Biblical Research at the University of Oslo, focuses his analysis on “social conflict and economic relations in Luke’s gospel.”

Gospel Accounts: Of the four gospel writers, Luke is most clearly interested in both Jesus’ views regarding not only the social but also economic order. So, Luke marks a most appropriate point of departure.

The tone of Luke is set early on, with Mother Mary proclaiming prior to Jesus’ birth: “...he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.’ (Luke 1:53)

Herewith, a more complete listing of comments by Jesus rendering viewpoints on economics of the kingdom of God. *Note:* Passages unique to Luke among the four New Testament gospel writers are shown in **boldface**.

⁹⁵ Infancy Gospel of James 11:7.

⁹⁶ Gospel of Peter 3:1.

⁹⁷ Egerton Gospel 3:2.

⁹⁸ Ebionites 6.

⁹⁹ Halvor Moxnes, *The Economy of the Kingdom*, 1988.

The Economics of Jesus (from Luke)

| Economic Topic | Comments |
|--|--|
| Taxation (Registration) | “In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered.” (2:1)¹⁰⁰ |
| Sharing (views of John the Baptist) | To the crowds: “Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.” (3:11) To tax collectors: “Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.” (3:13) To soldiers: “do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages.” (3:14) |
| Good News to the Poor (from Jesus) | Quoting Isaiah: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor...” (4:18) |
| The Poor | “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.” (6:20) |
| The Rich | “But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.” (6:24)¹⁰¹ |
| Sharing with Others | “Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again.” (6:30) |
| Lending | “If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again.” (6:34)¹⁰² |
| Good News for the Poor | To the disciples of John: “Go and tell John what you have heard: ...the poor have good news brought to them.” (7:22) |
| The Debtors & Love | “A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he canceled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?” (7:41-42)¹⁰³ |
| Women Providing for Jesus | “The twelve were with him, as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene ... and Joanna, the wife of Herod’s steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources.” (8:1-3) |
| The Mission of the Twelve Disciples | “Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money -- not even an extra tunic.” (9:3) |
| Nature of Discipleship | “What does it profit them if they gain the whole world, but lose or forfeit themselves?” (9:25) |
| Second Mission (of Seventy Disciples) | “Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one in the road.” (10:4) |
| Lord’s Prayer | “When you pray, say: Father, hallowed by your name. ... And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.” (11:2-4) |
| Giving of Alms | “So give for alms those things that are within; and see, everything will be clean for you.” (11:41) |
| Value of Sparrows vs. Humans | “Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten in god’s sight. But even the hairs of your head are all counted. Do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.” (12:6-7) |

¹⁰⁰ As a footnote to the NRSV indicates, “A Roman *registration*, or census, established control, especially for taxes and conscription.”

¹⁰¹ There is no parallel to this statement found in the other three gospels. Only the epistle of James offers a similar condemnation: “Come now, you rich people, weep and wail for the miseries that are coming to you.” (James 5:1)

¹⁰² There is no other New Testament parallel to this Lukan account. However, the non-canonical Gospel of Thomas provides a similar account of Jesus saying: “If you have money, don’t lend it at interest. Rather, give [it] to someone from whom you won’t get it back.” (Thomas 95)

¹⁰³ A denarius approximated a day’s wage.

| Economic Topic | Comments |
|--|---|
| Dividing an Inheritance | Someone in the crowd: “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.” Jesus to the person in the crowd: “Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?” Jesus to the entire crowd: “Take care! Be on you guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.” (12:13-15) ¹⁰⁴ |
| Parable of the Rich Fool | Jesus concludes: “...So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.” (12:16-21) ¹⁰⁵ |
| Treasure in Heaven | “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (12:32-34) ¹⁰⁶ |
| Parable of the Great Dinner | Excuses given by those who decline the invitation to attend. The first: “I have bought a piece of land, and I must go out and see it; please accept my regrets.” The second: “I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please accept my regrets.” (14:18-19) ¹⁰⁷ |
| Cost of Discipleship | “Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it?” (14:27-28) “So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.” (14:33) |
| Parable of the Lost Coin | “Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’ Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of god over one sinner who repents.” (15:8-10) ¹⁰⁸ |
| Parable of the Prodigal Son & His Brother | The younger son: “Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.” The son then “...squandered his property in dissolute living.” Upon the son’s return, the other faithful son gets angry. The father: “son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.” (15:11-32) |
| Parable of the Dishonest Manager | Jesus starts: “there was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was squandering his property.” After being confronted, the manager settles up his accounts for discounted payments. Jesus than concludes: “And his manager commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation that are |

¹⁰⁴ There is no corresponding account in the other three canonical gospels. The non-canonical Gospel of Thomas provides a similar story. From a person to Jesus: “Tell my brothers to divide my father’s possessions with me.” Jesus to the person: “Mister, who made me a divider?” To his disciples: “I’m not a divider, am I?” (Thomas 72)

¹⁰⁵ Again, there is no canonical counterpart to this parable. Thomas 63 provides a non-canonical parallel.

¹⁰⁶ In addition to Matthew 6:19-21, a parallel is found in Thomas 76:3.

¹⁰⁷ The third regret is not directly economic by the person declining places emphasis on a personal relationship: “I have just been married, and therefore I cannot come.” (Luke 14:20) A separate version of this parable is provided by Matthew 22:1-10, but no reasons are given for why the guests decline. Thomas 64 provides another account. As with Luke, the first two invitees decline for economic reasons.

¹⁰⁸ While there is no parallel in the New Testament gospels, there appears to be a reference to the parable of the ‘silver coins’ in Secret James 6:15.

| Economic Topic | Comments |
|--|---|
| | the children of light. And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth so that when it is gone, they may welcome you into the eternal homes. Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much. If then you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches?" (16:1-12) |
| Serving God vs. Wealth | "You cannot serve God and wealth." (16:13) ¹⁰⁹ |
| Parable of the Rich Man & Lazarus | Jesus starts: "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine line and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus...The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was being tormented..." (16:19-31) |
| Parable of the Pharisee & Tax Collector | "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector." The Pharisee: God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income." The tax collector: "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." Jesus commentary: "I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted." (18:9-14) |
| The Rich Ruler | Jesus: "Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." After the rich ruler declines, Jesus comments: "How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." (18:18-25) |
| The Rich Tax Collector Zacchaeus | Zacchaeus to Jesus: "Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay him back four times as much." Jesus: "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost." (19:1-10) |
| Parable of the Ten Pounds ¹¹⁰ | To the first slave who made ten more pounds, the nobleman says: Well don, good slave! Because you have been trustworthy in a very small thing, take charge of ten cities." To a second who makes five pounds, the nobleman gives "rule over five cities." To the third slave who wrapped the ten pounds in a cloth and did nothing, the nobleman replies: "You knew, did you, that I was a harsh man, taking what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow? When then did you not put my money into the bank? Then when I returned, I could have collected it with interest." To the bystanders: "Take the pound from him and give it to the one who has ten pounds.... I tell you, to all those who have, more will be given; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away." (19:11-27) |
| Parable of the Wicked Tenants | After the tenants kill three slaves and the owner's son who had come to collect their share of the vineyard produce, Jesus comments that the owner "...will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others." (20:9-16) |

¹⁰⁹ The identical phrase is found in Matthew 6:24. The earlier portion of Luke's quotation of Jesus saying that "No slave can serve two masters is also found at Thomas 47:2; however Thomas does not include the part about the incompatibility of serving God and wealth.

¹¹⁰ The mina (translated here as a pound) was about three months' wages for a laborer.

| Economic Topic | Comments |
|---|---|
| Lawfulness of Paying Taxes to the Emperor | "...give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's" (20:25) ¹¹¹ |
| The Widow's Offering | Jesus sees rich people placing gifts in the temple treasury, than a widow contributing two small copper coins. Jesus: "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them; for all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on." (21:1-4) |
| Judas' Betrayal Plot | "Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was one of the twelve; he went away and conferred with the chief priest and officers of the temple police about how he might betray him to them. There were greatly pleased and agreed to give him money." (22:3-6) |

Note: Passages unique to Luke among the four New Testament gospel writers are shown in **boldface**.

Only nine of the 30 incidents described above are found in a separate gospel – to corroborate Luke's account. Over two-thirds of these incidents are reported uniquely by Luke.

With two exceptions, none of the incidents offered by other gospel writers coincide with Luke's view of the incompatibility of wealth and spirituality. However, even these two exceptions both serve to illustrate the chasm between Luke and his fellow synoptic writers.

The first exception is the statement of Jesus that: "You cannot serve God and wealth." (found also in Matthew). Yet the context provided by the two gospels is quite different. Luke's account is both preceded and followed by a parable emphasizing the condemnation that befalls those of wealth – whether earned honestly or dishonestly. Matthew's statement is immediately followed by the theme of not worrying about what one will eat, drink or wear tomorrow. In other words, while Luke condemns wealth of all types, Matthew condemns only reliance on wealth more than on God.

The second exception relates to the incident wherein Jesus asks a wealthy man to sell his possessions, distributing the proceeds to the poor. All three synoptics record this event, including Jesus infamous if not perplexing next statement that it is "easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." However, in this case, Luke's Jesus joins the other synoptics by acknowledging that even the rich can be saved: "What is impossible for mortals is possible for God."

Matthew contains few additional references to money not already found in Luke. However, one noteworthy difference is found in Chapter 2. Upon their arrival in Bethlehem, the wise men offer gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.¹¹²

¹¹¹ Matthew and Mark also attribute this response to Jesus. The non-canonical Thomas also contains a similar response but with an added twist: "Give the emperor what belongs to the emperor, give God what belongs to God, and give me what is mine." (Thomas 100:2-3)

¹¹² Matthew 2:11.

Matthew offers a different version of a beatitude regarding the poor than is found in Luke. With Matthew, the beatitude is “Blessed are the poor *in spirit*, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (5:3, *italics added*)

Of the four gospels, only Matthew quotes Jesus as saying: “So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues, and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. ... your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” (6:2-4)

In Matthew, Jesus is more explicit about his instructions to the twelve than in Luke: “You received without payment; give without payment. Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for laborers deserve their food.” (10:9-10)

Of the gospel writers, only Matthew’s Jesus offers the parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl: “The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.” (13:44-46)¹¹³

Matthew also provides a parable unique to this account, that of the unforgiving servant. The servant owes his master a considerable amount. The servant then goes to coerce payments from fellow slaves, throwing those who could not pay into prison. The master finds out and hands the servant over to be tortured. Jesus punch line: “So my heavenly Father will also do to everyone of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.” (18:23-35)

Matthew uniquely offers the parable of the laborers in the vineyard. All workers receive the same daily wage, regardless of their starting time. The landowner maintains that he is fulfilling all that was agreed upon, saying: “Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you.” Jesus observes in conclusion: “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.” (20:1-16)

Only Matthew indicates that Judas betrays Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. After the condemnation of Jesus, Judas repents and attempts to return the silver, then commits suicide. (27:3-10)¹¹⁴

After Jesus’ resurrection, Matthew indicates that the guards at the tomb were bribed to say that Jesus’ disciples had removed his dead body from the tomb. (28:11-15)

Some of the most interesting accounts deal only directly with monetary value. For example, all three synoptics provide an account of Jesus relocating an unclean spirit from

¹¹³ There are parallels to this passage of Matthew that can also be found in Thomas 109 and 76.

¹¹⁴ This account of Judas’ remorse is not found in the other NT gospels but in Acts 1:15-20.

one man to a herd of swine, who then rush down into the lake and drown. The frightened swineherds run off to tell what happened in the city and surrounding country.

Subsequently, the Gerasenes ask Jesus to leave them. Luke describes their great fear -- he does not identify the object of their fear. Presumably, one fear could be economic -- the ruination of a commodity with economic value.¹¹⁵

Similarly, Luke relates Jesus' admonishment: "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."¹¹⁶

Mark generally appears to be unconcerned about economic transactions. However, periodically, Mark gives an incident that parallels the other synoptics.

For example, all three synoptics provide an account of Jesus feeding the five thousand. Before Jesus performs the miracle, each of the three synoptics records the disciples urging Jesus to send the crowd back to the villages to purchase food.

Jesus responds by asking the disciples to give the crowd something to eat. Only Mark records the next response of the disciples: "Are we to go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread, and give it to them to eat?"¹¹⁷

Similarly, all four gospels recount the story of the woman in Bethany who brings an alabaster jar, broke it and poured pure myrrh over Jesus' head. Only Mark reports that the annoyance from some included a calculation of how much the ointment was worth: The criticism leveled comes in the form of a question: "Why was the ointment wasted in this way? For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor."¹¹⁸

More so than Mark, the Gospel of John has even less to say about matters economic. However, one act of economic radicalism happens early in John, related in explicit detail:

... in the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the

¹¹⁵ The Lukan version of this account is found at Luke 8:26-39. Parallel synoptic accounts are found in Matthew 8:28-34 and Mark 5:1-20.

¹¹⁶ Luke 9:62.

¹¹⁷ Mark 6:37. A denarius was about the equivalent of one day's wage for a laborer, so 200 denarii was a substantial sum.

¹¹⁸ Mark 14:4-5. In Luke, the value of the anointing oil comes out in a different way. Rather than the Pharisees grumbling about the amount, Jesus himself gives a value in the form of a parable: "A certain creditor had two debtors, one who owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty." (Luke 7:41-42)

doves, “Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace.”¹¹⁹

In addition to the synoptics, John also provides an account of Jesus feeding the 5,000. John records that Jesus observed the large crowd, then turns to Philip and asks: “‘Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?’ He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, ‘Six months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.’”¹²⁰

John’s next brush with money comes at the time when Mary anoints Jesus in Bethany: “Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus’ feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, ‘Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?’ (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it).” Jesus responds, asking that Mary be left alone and noting that: “You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.”¹²¹

James & Paul: The brother of Jesus has a definite attitude about wealth, expressed early in his epistle: “Let the believer who is lowly boast in being raised up, and the rich in being brought low, because the rich will disappear like a flower in a field...”¹²²

James then launches into a diatribe against those who would show partiality to the rich and well dressed over the poor and unkempt in “your assembly.” He concludes:

Has not god chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court? Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you?¹²³

James goes on to further develop issues of poverty in his exhortation to works, not just faith: “If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,’ and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith, by itself, if it has no works, is dead.”¹²⁴

In drawing his epistle to a close, James issues one more warning to rich oppressors:

¹¹⁹ John 2:14-16.

¹²⁰ John 6:5-7.

¹²¹ John 12:3-6,8.

¹²² James 1:9-10.

¹²³ James 2:5-7.

¹²⁴ James 2:15-17.

Come now, you rich people, weep and wail for the miseries that are coming to you. Your riches have rotted, and your clothes are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have rusted, and their rust will be evidence against you, and it will eat you flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure for the last days. Listen! The wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. You have lived on the earth in luxury and in pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered the righteous one, who does not resist you.¹²⁵

Moving to the writings of Paul, a yet different emphasis on matters economic is found. To the Romans, Paul writes about taxes: “For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God’s servants, busy with this very thing. Pay to all what is due them -- taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due.”¹²⁶

To the Corinthians, Paul uses an analogy built around the concept of labor: “The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labor of each. For we are God’s servants, working together; you are God’s field, God’s building.”¹²⁷

In this Corinthian epistle, Paul goes on to describe the poverty of the laborers in the field: “To the present hour we are hungry and thirsty, we are poorly clothed and beaten and homeless, and we grow weary from the work of our own hands.”¹²⁸

In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul addresses the less than desirable economic situations in which many followers are bound: “...as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.”¹²⁹ Later, he refers back to Jesus who “though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.”¹³⁰

Paul also refers to the collection he is taking on behalf of believers in Jerusalem: “So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you, and arrange in advance for this bountiful gift that you have promised, so that it may be ready as a voluntary gift and not as an extortion.”¹³¹

To the Ephesians, Paul addresses both economic and social aspects of slavery: “Slaves obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, in singleness of hear, as you obey

¹²⁵ James 5:1-6.

¹²⁶ Romans 13:6-7.

¹²⁷ I Corinthians 3:7-9.

¹²⁸ I Corinthians 4:11-12.

¹²⁹ II Corinthians 6:10.

¹³⁰ II Corinthians 8:9.

¹³¹ II Corinthians 9:5.

Christ; not only while being watched, and in order to please them, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. Render service with enthusiasm, as to the Lord and not to men and women.”¹³²

To the Philippians, Paul acknowledges an important gift: ‘You Philippians indeed know that in the early days of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you alone. For even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me help for my needs more than once.’¹³³

And to the Thessalonians, Paul is explicit in admonishing against free-loading:

For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us; we were not idle when we were with you, and we did not eat anyone’s bread without paying for it; but with toil and labor we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you. This was not because we do not have that right, but in order to give you and example to imitate. For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: *Anyone unwilling to work should not eat.*¹³⁴

Non-Canonical Gospels: In Thomas, Jesus on a few occasions uses examples with economic content to make a spiritual point. For example, Mary asks: “What are you disciples like?”¹³⁵ In his response, Jesus gives the example of protecting ones possessions against thieves: “...if the owners of a house know that a thief is coming, they will be on guard before the thief arrives, and will not let the thief break into their house (their domain) and steal their possessions. As for you, then, be on guard against the world.”¹³⁶

Like Luke and James, the Jesus of Thomas empathizes with the poor: “Congratulations to the poor, for to you belongs Heaven’s domain.” (Thomas 54) And in a story with parallels to Luke, Jesus tells of “...a rich man who had a great deal of money. He said, ‘I shall invest my money so that I may sow, reap, plant, and fill my storehouses with produce, so that I may lack nothing.’ Those were the things he was thinking in his heart, but that very night he died.” (63:1-4)

Thomas also has Jesus telling the story of the master who prepared dinner for his wealthy friends, all of whom decline. As in Matthew and Luke, the master then instructs his slave to “Go out on the streets and bring back whomever you find to have dinner.” (64:11) Thomas concludes with Jesus observing: “Buyers and merchants [will] not enter the places of my Father.” (64:12)

Yet, also like Matthew and Luke, Thomas relates the parable of the master whose son is killed as he goes to collect rent from a vineyard. (65)

¹³² Ephesians 6:5-8.

¹³³ Philippians 4:15-16.

¹³⁴ II Thessalonians 3:7-10.

¹³⁵ Thomas 21:1.

¹³⁶ Thomas 21:5-6.

As in Luke, Jesus is confronted by an individual who asks: “Tell my brothers to divide my father’s possessions with me. In Thomas, Jesus responds: “Mister, who made me a divider?” He turns to his disciples and asks: “I’m not a divider, am I?” (72:1-3)

In a parallel to Matthew, Thomas recounts the parable of the merchant who sells all for a pearl. The punch line: “So also with you, seek his treasure that is unfailing, that is enduring, where no moth comes to eat and no worm destroys.” (76:3)

Jesus asks: “Why have you come out to the countryside? To see a reed shaken by the wind? And to see a person dressed in soft clothes, [like your] rulers and your powerful ones? They are dressed in soft clothes, and they cannot understand truth.” (78)¹³⁷

In what appears to be a reversal, Thomas quotes Jesus: “The one who has become wealthy should reign, and the one who has power should renounce <it>.” (81)¹³⁸

In yet another parallel to Matthew and Luke, the Jesus of Thomas’ gospel proclaims: “If you have money, don’t lend it at interest. Rather, give [it] to someone from whom you won’t get it back.” (Thomas 95)

Once more, Thomas follows Matthew and Luke, but with a unique twist in response to the question about paying taxes: “Give the emperor what belongs to the emperor, give God what belongs to God, *and give me what is mine.*” (100:2-4)

In yet another apparent reversal, Thomas has Jesus saying: “The <Father’s> imperial rule is like a person who had a treasure hidden in his field but did not know it. And [when] he died he left it to his [son]. The son [did] not know <about it either>. He took over the field and sold it. The buyer went plowing, [discovered] the treasure, and began to lend money at interest to whomever he wished.” (109)

The next saying has Jesus saying: “The one who has found the world, and has become wealthy, should renounce the world.” (110)

The Infancy Gospel of Thomas has Jesus expressing his economic values as a child. Jesus goes with his father to work the fields. At the harvest, an 8-year old Jesus then “...summoned all the poor in the village to the threshing floor and gave them grain. Joseph carried back what was left of the grain.”¹³⁹

However, Infancy Thomas also has Jesus performing miracles to benefit the wealthy and his father economically. Joseph is making a bed for a rich man, but one cross beam turns out shorter than the other. Jesus then stretches the one board to make it as long as the

¹³⁷ This account is paralleled by Matthew 11:7-9 and Luke 12:33-34.

¹³⁸ Parallels are found at Matthew 19:23 and Luke 18:24.

¹³⁹ Infancy Thomas 12:3.

other: “His father Joseph looked on and marveled, and he hugged and kissed the child, saying, “How fortunate I am that God has given this child to me.”¹⁴⁰

The Egerton gospel has Jesus responding to the question of whether to pay taxes in an altogether different manner. Jesus becomes indignant, and asks: “Why do you pay me lip service as a teacher, but not [do] what I say? ... their heart stays far away from me; their worship of me is empty, [because they insist on teachings that are human] commandments.”¹⁴¹

In early Christian commentary, Jerome writes that the Nazoreans and Ebionites use a gospel that tells of a man with a crippled hand, who asks Jesus: “I was a stonemason making a living with my hands. I plead with you, Jesus, give me back my health so that I won’t have to beg for my food in shame.”¹⁴² Unfortunately, any response that Jesus offered is lost to history (at least for now).

Origen quotes a “Gospel of the Hebrews” as offering an account of the interaction between the rich man and Jesus. This account is similar to those of Matthew and Luke, except that Origen also quotes Jesus as saying: “How can you say that you follow the Law and the Prophets? In the Law it says: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ Look around you: many of your brothers and sisters, sons and daughters of Abraham, are living in filth and dying of hunger. Your house is full of good things and not a thing of yours manages to get out to them.”¹⁴³

And in an interesting commentary on Matthew 25:19-30, the early church historian Eusebius (4th century) writes:

The gospel written in the Hebrew alphabet that we have obtained has the threat being made not against the man who had hidden the money, but against the one who had behaved dissolutely. He (the master) had three slaves. One squandered his master’s resources with prostitutes and dance hall girls, one multiplied his earnings, and one hid the money. One was later commended, one was merely criticized, and one was thrown into prison. This makes me wonder whether in Matthew the threat that is made after the statement against the man who did nothing might refer not to him, but rather, by the literary device of echoing, to the first man who had been eating and drinking with the drunks.¹⁴⁴

In effect, Eusebius is quoting the now lost gospel of the Nazoreans to say that, unlike Matthew, the master punishes the drunken slave, not the one who hid his money.

¹⁴⁰ Infancy Thomas 13:4.

¹⁴¹ Egerton Gospel 3:5-6.

¹⁴² Gospel of the Nazoreans 4. This excerpt comes from commentary of Jerome on Matthew 12:13.

¹⁴³ Nazoreans 6:3-5.

¹⁴⁴ Nazoreans 8.

Summary Economics: Of the New Testament writers, the two who most clearly advocate Jesus as an agent for leveling the economic playing field are Luke and James. Luke achieves economic justice via the Robin Hood method of taking from the rich and giving to the poor. James is not as concerned with income or wealth inequality as he is with unequal treatment of Christians based on wealth.

Other New Testament writings and non-canonical gospels come across with considerably more ambivalence. For Matthew and John, Jesus could be a friend of the wealthy and the impoverished alike.

11. Eschatology

Eschatology relates to the teaching of *last things* including destruction of the earth as we know it – to judgment and resurrection.

Gospel Accounts: Matthew is relatively silent on this subject through much of his gospel. In response to a question of the Sadducees, Jesus speaks to the issue of non-marriage in after resurrection.¹⁴⁵

But then sitting on the Mount of Olives within a few days of his death, Jesus cuts loose with an apocalyptic vision unparalleled in the other gospels. Matthew's Jesus speaks of signs of the end of the age, coming persecutions, a desolating sacrilege in the holy place, the coming of the son of man at the angels' trumpet call, the need to be watchful, and the judgment of the righteous versus sinners (with the rewards of eternal life versus eternal punishment).¹⁴⁶

After Jesus' resurrection, Matthew finishes his gospel with the great commission and the closing line: "And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."¹⁴⁷

The first hint of a hereafter comes in Jesus response to the request of James and John to sit at the right and left hands of Jesus "in your glory". As part of his response, Jesus indicates that "...to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it for those for whom it has been prepared."¹⁴⁸ Like Matthew, Mark's Jesus also responds to the Sadducees question about no marriage after resurrection, because those raised from the dead are like "angels in heaven."¹⁴⁹

Like Matthew, Mark provides an abbreviated apocalyptic vision, though its start appears to be more connected to destruction of the temple than perhaps to the later *end times*. And like Matthew, Mark's gospel speaks to coming persecution, the desolating sacrilege,

¹⁴⁵ Matthew 22:30.

¹⁴⁶ Mathew 24-25.

¹⁴⁷ Matthew 28:20.

¹⁴⁸ Mark 10:40.

¹⁴⁹ Mark 12:25.

the coming of the Son of Man “to gather his elect from the four winds”, and the need for watchfulness.¹⁵⁰

Luke repeats the eschatological themes found in Matthew and Mark and adds a few of his own. His opener is unique to Luke. Before talking about bringing division, he declares: “I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled.”¹⁵¹

In describing the “narrow door” to salvation, Luke’s Jesus goes on to describe “...weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves will be thrown out.”¹⁵² Luke also is the only gospel writer to describe hell (or Hades) in explicit terms albeit in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus the poor man.¹⁵³

Luke works from Jesus foretelling of his suffering and rejection to a broader description of what happens “on the day that the Son of Man is revealed.” He continues, noting: “I tell you, on that night there will be two in one bed; one will be taken and the other left.”¹⁵⁴

Luke repeats and elaborates on the response that Matthew and Mark provide to the question the Sadducees pose regarding the resurrection. Then, Luke launches into a description of the temple’s destruction, followed by themes of persecution, the coming Son of Man and being on guard.¹⁵⁵

As is the case with other topics, the eschatology of John’s Jesus takes a somewhat different course. John is the only gospel writer that does not refer to hell. Much of his vision of end times is focused on the brighter side of the hereafter, i.e. heaven.

In the well known passage of Chapter 3, Jesus talks of the prospects for eternal life. Later in the same chapter, he describes: “The one who comes from heaven is above all.”¹⁵⁶

John’s Jesus describes “bread from heaven” and goes on to explain: “This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day.”¹⁵⁷ Later Jesus states to his audience: You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world.”¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁰ Mark 13.

¹⁵¹ Luke 12:49.

¹⁵² Luke 13:28.

¹⁵³ Luke 16:19-31.

¹⁵⁴ Luke 17:30,34.

¹⁵⁵ Luke 21.

¹⁵⁶ John 3:31.

¹⁵⁷ John 6:40.

¹⁵⁸ John 8:23.

Subsequently, Jesus introduces the future residence of the disciples in a well known passage: “In my father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?”¹⁵⁹

Nowhere does the Gospel of John describe the apocalyptic end times in terms similar to those of the synoptics. There is very little written about judgment, other than to note that: “about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.”¹⁶⁰

James & Paul: Even James refers to the future second coming, urging: “Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord.”¹⁶¹

Many of Paul’s letters do not contain any explicit theology of eschatology. However, there are brief glimpses provided here and there.

To the Corinthians, Paul writes of the resurrection body and then the resurrection event: “For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.”¹⁶²

In the first letter to the Thessalonians, this theme is repeated but with more detail: “For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call and with the sound of god’s trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever.”¹⁶³

Finally, even the second letter to Timothy addresses that “in the last days distressing times will come.”¹⁶⁴ The writer (some dispute Paul’s purported authorship) goes on to characterize the evil nature of people living in those times.

Other New Testament Accounts: The apostle John also has been commonly viewed as the author of the apocalyptic vision described in the ending book of the New Testament canon – Revelation. However, this authorship has been disputed both by a number of early Christian writers as well as modern scholars.

The inclusion of Revelation in the canon was contested; it was the last book to be included in what is now known as the New Testament. Consequently, for purposes of this review, Revelation is not included as representative of the writings attributable to the author of the Gospel of John. Rather, Revelation is more likely attributable to a later writer (not a direct witness to Jesus’ ministry), but possibly a member of a ‘Johannine community’.

¹⁵⁹ John 14:2.

¹⁶⁰ John 16:11.

¹⁶¹ James 5:7.

¹⁶² I Corinthians 15:52.

¹⁶³ I Thessalonians 4:16-17.

¹⁶⁴ II Timothy 3:1.

Non-Canonical Accounts: The Gospel of Thomas provides several somewhat ambiguous sayings that might be perceived as eschatological in nature, depending on one's point of view. These sayings also incline more toward the Gnostic than much of the rest of this gospel. In Thomas 10: "Jesus said, 'I have cast fire upon the world, and look, I'm guarding it until it blazes.'"

In Thomas 11, another saying of even more ambiguous meaning: "This heaven will pass away and the one above it will pass away. The dead are not alive, and the living will not die. During the days when you ate what is dead, you made it come alive

Thomas 111 has Jesus saying: "The heavens and the earth will roll up in your presence, and whoever is living from the living one will not see death."

But then, in Thomas 113, Jesus backs away from an apocalyptic vision. In response to the disciples' question of when the Father's imperial rule will arrive, Jesus indicates: "It will not come by watching for it. It will not be said, 'Look, here!' or 'Look, there!' Rather, the Father's imperial rule is spread out upon the earth, and people don't see it."

In the Dialogue of the Savior, there is a vague reference to what sources of heavenly authority. In this non-canonical gospel, it is Judas who comments: "Look, the archons are above us; so, then, it is they who will rule over us." Jesus responds: "It is you who will rule over them. But when you remove envy from you, then you will clothe yourselves with light and enter the bridal suite."¹⁶⁵

Eschatology Summarized: Those who would like to disassociate Jesus from apocalyptic fervor had best make their case without reliance on early Christian literature. Virtually all of the written Christian documentation we have of Jesus clearly associates him with some form of eschatological views. The writings of Matthew, Luke, and (occasionally) Paul are particularly pronounced in this regard. The non-canonical Gospel of Thomas also contains several sayings with apocalyptic overtones.

In short, those who would reckon with the Jesus of history are forced to come to terms with a man who espoused the end of the world. The statements are limited in number, but those made often do so forcefully. They can not be ignored.

12. Gentiles

To what extent did Jesus interact with those who were not Jews? Did he interact with Gentiles of his own volition? How did he treat those with whom he came into contact?

Gospel Accounts: The gospel of Matthew involves a very early contact by Jesus with what likely were Gentiles – in the story of the visit from the wise men wishing to pay homage to the infant Jesus. Obviously, this visit was not influenced by the desires of an

¹⁶⁵ Dialogue of the Savior 19:5-6.

infant, though it could well have been divinely inspired. It presages interactions outside of Judaism that were to come years later.

Matthew's next account has Jesus healing the servant of a Roman centurion. When Jesus hears the faith expressed by one who understands (military) authority, Jesus comments: "Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith." Jesus goes on to indicate that the "heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."¹⁶⁶

Another contact occurs with a Canaanite woman who asks for help in removing a demon from her daughter. In this instance, the initial response seems considerably less welcoming. The disciples try to send her away. Even Jesus is vexed: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."¹⁶⁷

Then comes a remarkable plea that changes Jesus apparent position: "But she came and knelt before him, saying, 'Lord, help me.' He answered, 'It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.' She said, 'Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.'

This gentile has finally penetrated Jesus reserve – or passed the test. Because, now Jesus answers her, 'Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.' And her daughter was healed instantly."¹⁶⁸

Jesus is tested over the question of allegiance to the emperor, specifically paying taxes. Jesus takes a Roman coin with the emperor's image and responds to the Pharisees: "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." (22:21)

Jesus' final reference to both Jews and Gentiles occurs at the end of Matthew with his great commission: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...."¹⁶⁹

Mark's gospel provides a more circumscribed view of Jesus' relationship with Gentiles. Mark also tells the story of the Syrophoenician woman's faith, albeit more cryptically and with a somewhat different slant. In Matthew, there is the clear impression that the event took place outside. While Jesus was in the area of Tyre and Sidon, a woman "came out and started shouting."¹⁷⁰

In Mark, the event clearly takes place indoors as Jesus: "...entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, but a woman whose

¹⁶⁶ Matthew 8:10,12.

¹⁶⁷ Matthew 15:24.

¹⁶⁸ Matthew 15:25-28.

¹⁶⁹ Matthew 28:20.

¹⁷⁰ Matthew 15:21.

little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet.” Mark then makes clear that the woman was a “Gentile, of Syrophoenician origin.”¹⁷¹

A final difference comes when the woman gives her analogy of even dogs getting their crumbs. While Matthew’s Jesus says, “Great is your faith,” Mark’s Jesus says, “For saying that, you may go – the demon has left your daughter.”¹⁷² Mark provides a more direct sense of cause and effect. The exorcism is not the result so much of faith, but rather of the woman’s insistence and sharp response to Jesus’ initial resistance. It’s almost as though she has beat Jesus into submission, bested him at the game.

Mark also provides a version of the great commission, paralleling that of Matthew. And today’s New Testaments typically end with a great commission: “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation.” (verse 15 of chapter 16). However, most scholars now believe that these last few verses represent an addition to the earlier manuscripts of Mark, which end at verse 8 of chapter 16.

Luke’s gospel closely parallels Matthew, albeit with a few noteworthy differences. The account of the Roman centurion is prefaced with an appeal from Jewish elders who attest that the centurion “...is worthy of having you do this for him, for he loves our people, and it is he who built our synagogue for us.”

Unlike Matthew, Luke’s presents a more contrite centurion who sends friends on his behalf to say: “Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; therefore I did not presume to come to you. But only speak the word, and let my servant be healed.”¹⁷³ In Luke, there is no evidence that Jesus ever actually meets the centurion.

Luke also provides a unique story of a Samaritan village that refused to receive Jesus. The disciples ask: “Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them.”¹⁷⁴ Jesus verbally rebukes the disciples, but yet they immediately travel on to another village.

This account is counterbalanced a chapter later by Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan. Luke does not provide an account of the Syrophoenician women, but also ends his gospel with a statement of the great commission (also repeated in a different manner at the beginning of Acts).

As might be expected, John’s gospel provides a completely different and also more circumscribed discussion of relationships with non-Jews. John presents no Roman centurion though there is a similar account of healing the son of a royal official

¹⁷¹ Mark 7:24-26.

¹⁷² Mark 7:29.

¹⁷³ Luke 7:4-7.

¹⁷⁴ Luke 9:54.

(potentially from the court of Herod Antipas). There is no Syrophoenician woman and no great commission.

The sole significant reference to relationships with non-Jews in John is provided by the account of Jesus and the woman of Samaria, to whom Jesus gave “living water.” Of particular interest is Jesus’ response to the woman’s assertion that he believes where the place people must worship even though: “Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain.” (probably Mount Gerizim).

Jesus response implicitly suggests an imminent leveling of the playing field for Jews and others, though his comments remain somewhat ambiguous: “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship *what you do not know*; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him.”¹⁷⁵

All four gospels place Jesus in contact with Gentile authority – in the person of the Roman procurator Pontius Pilate. Jesus’ attitude toward Pilate was one of seeming indifference. Matthew records that when asked if he was “King of the Jews,” Jesus gave replied in brief: “You say so.” Matthew then goes on to note that Jesus gave Pilate “*no answer*, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.”¹⁷⁶

Mark and Luke corroborate Matthew’s version. Luke also provides a tantalizing clue as to why Jesus may have been curt with Pilate. For earlier in his gospel, Luke notes that Jesus was well aware of prior atrocities committed against Jews by Pilate, specifically and incident when Pilate had mingled the blood of Galileans with that of their (animal) sacrifices.¹⁷⁷

John’s gospel provides a sharply different portrayal of Jesus encounter with the procurator. John recalls far greater verbal interaction between Roman judge and Jewish defendant. The encounter is worth recalling in some detail.

Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus answered, “Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?” Pilate replied, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?” Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.” Pilate asked him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and

¹⁷⁵ John 4:20-24.

¹⁷⁶ Matthew 27:11-14.

¹⁷⁷ Luke 13:1. The brutality of Pilate towards the people of Judea and Samaria is recounted in greater detail by the 1st century Jewish author Josephus.

for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” Pilate asked him, “What is truth?”¹⁷⁸

Jesus is considerably more verbose from the get-go. Rather than replying with the brief statement “You say so” as the synoptics indicate to the question of whether he is a king, Jesus responds to the procurator with a question of his own. They then get into a discussion, with Jesus owning up to his kingship but also clarifying to say that his kingdom is “not from this world.” In other words, he is no direct threat to Gentile (i.e. Roman) authority.

It is only when Pilate veers off to the philosophical, asking “what is truth” that the conversation stops. Perhaps the question was rhetorical. At any rate, Pilate steps out to the crowd ready to release Jesus. However, the procurator gives in to the blood-lust of those assembled, then goes back inside for one last exchange with Jesus. As John tells the story:

He (Pilate) entered his headquarters again and asked Jesus, “Where are you from?” But Jesus gave him no answer.¹⁰ Pilate therefore said to him, “Do you refuse to speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?”¹¹ Jesus answered him, “You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.”¹⁷⁹

This time (as in the synoptics) Jesus gives the silent treatment. But he is goaded into a response, as Pilate threatens execution by crucifixion. In reply, Jesus makes clear his perspective that Roman authority is inconsequential; the orders are coming from further above – by divine authority.

Here then, is a real test of Jesus interactions with and views of both the Gentile world and civil authority. He will interact – when forced or prodded. But he also maintains a clear distance and separation. And when push comes to shove, the God of the Jews trumps Gentile authority.

James & Paul: In sharp contrast with gospel writers and the apostle Paul, James essentially ignores the question of salvation for Gentiles. Implicitly, the book appears aimed at the nation of Israel only: “Was not *our* ancestor Abraham justified by works....”¹⁸⁰

James also repudiates contact with a (non-law abiding) world: “Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?”¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁸ John 18:33-38.

¹⁷⁹ John 19:9-11.

¹⁸⁰ James 2:21.

¹⁸¹ James 4:4.

Paul is much more direct in his acceptance of Gentiles, as a central focus of his mission. The focus is clearly presented, for example, at the outset of his letter to the Romans. Paul proclaims that “Jesus Christ our Lord” is the one “through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name....”¹⁸²

Non-Canonical Gospels: Of the non-canonical gospels, only the Gospel of Thomas directly provides any comparable glimpses into Jesus’ views of Gentiles. For example, the Gospel of Thomas offers a response by Jesus to the question of taxation, but with a unique twist: “Give the emperor what belongs to the emperor, give God what belongs to God, and give me what is mine.”¹⁸³

Jesus also speaks indirectly to the issue of Jew versus Gentile with comments on a custom key to the Jewish tradition: “His disciples said to him, ‘Is circumcision useful or not?’ He said to them, ‘If it were useful, their father would produce children already circumcised from their mother. Rather, the true circumcision in spirit has become profitable in every respect.’”¹⁸⁴

Thomas also presents a fragmentary text referring to a Samaritan carrying a lamb. The lamb can only be eaten after it has been killed and become a carcass. Jesus message: “So also with you, or you might become a carcass and be eaten.”¹⁸⁵

Gentiles Summarized: Even in the best of circumstances, Jesus’ earthly interactions with those outside the realm of Judaism could be described as prickly. Matthew, Luke and Paul provide perhaps the most favorable treatment of these interactions, but even here the treatment is uneven – especially in Matthew.

Consistent with Mark’s demeanor on other topics, his gospel provides a more cynical portrayal – a *quid pro quo* type of relationship. Treatment of Gentiles by John and Thomas also comes across as ambivalent – though Thomas seems at least disparaging toward continuing to impose this custom of Judaism. And as John recounts, Jesus will interact with pagan authority – but on his own, divine terms.

What may be as significant as these references to Gentiles are the omissions. Of course, we can not know specifically what other encounters Jesus may have had with Gentiles may have been omitted. But we do know one thing; Jesus grew up within walking distance of the urban and hellenized center of Galilee.

Nazareth is situated only a handful of miles from Sepphoris, the Roman seat of governance for Galilee. Yet Sepphoris is never once mentioned in any of the New

¹⁸² Romans 1:4-5.

¹⁸³ Thomas 100:2.

¹⁸⁴ Thomas 53.

¹⁸⁵ Thomas 60:6.

Testament, nor in the non-canonical gospels. For Jesus and his followers, its as though this source of nearby paganism never existed.

13. Heaven

When the topic is the afterlife (whether heaven or hell), the writers of both our canonical and non-canonical books have quite a bit to say. Unfortunately, none of these writers ever clearly defines or provides an encompassing description of either heaven or hell. Rather, the reader is left to collect tidbits from multiple references – in hopes of piecing together some composite picture. While the evidence is somewhat lengthy, it is useful to consider in its totality.

Old Testament References: The concept of heaven is shared between Old and New Testaments. Depending on the English translation, there are anywhere from about 100 to over 300 OT references to “heaven.”¹⁸⁶

The Old Testament generally portrays heaven as a place where God live, not necessarily accessible to humans. From his home in heaven, God reaches out to assist the Israelites and at times others including non-Jew Hagar.¹⁸⁷ Enoch walks with God and Elijah is transported to heaven in a whirlwind.

In the Psalms, God is describe as: “He who sits in the heavens laughs; the LORD has them in derision.”¹⁸⁸

In Job, Zophar speaks to Job, asking “Can you find out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limit of the Almighty? It is higher than heaven —what can you do? Deeper than Sheol—what can you know?”¹⁸⁹

And in a psalm of David, there is hope in a destiny apart from Sheol, the grave: “For you do not give me up to Sheol, or let your faithful one see the Pit. You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy; in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”¹⁹⁰ Heaven is not mentioned by name, but implied. It is a place where there are *pleasures forevermore*.

Gospel Accounts: When speaking of heaven, the writer with the most to say is Matthew. In large part, this is because Matthew widely uses the term “kingdom of heaven” rather than the term “kingdom of God” favored by Mark, Luke and John. Whether or not this is just a matter of semantics is considered a little later. First, look at the evidence from Matthew – all of it:

¹⁸⁶ The NRSV has 246 references to heaven in 233 OT verses.

¹⁸⁷ Genesis 21:17.

¹⁸⁸ Psalm 2:4.

¹⁸⁹ Job 11:7,8. Sheol has often been translated as hell, more properly as the deep.

¹⁹⁰ Psalm 16:10-11.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (5:3)

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (5:10)

“...let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your father in heaven.” (5:16)

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (5:17-20)

“Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God.... (5:34)

“Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. (6:9)

“For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you....” (6:14)

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my father in heaven.” (7:21)

To the followers of the Roman Centurion: “...many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness....” (7:11-12)

To the disciples: “As you go, proclaim the good news, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’” (10:7)

“Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my father in heaven.” (10:32-33)

“Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force.” (11:11-12)

“And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? No, you will be brought down to Hades.” (11:23)

“I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants....” (11:25)

To the disciples: “to you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.” (12:11)

“The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed....” (13:31)

“The kingdom of heaven is like yeast....” (13:33)

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field....” (13:44)

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls....” (13:45)

“...every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.” (13:52)

To Peter in response to the question of Jesus identity: “For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven.” (16:17)

“I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” (16:19)

The disciples ask Jesus: “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” (18:1)

Jesus response: “...unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” (18:3-4)

“Take care that you do not despise one of these little ones; for, I tell you, in heaven their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven.” (18:10)

“...whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven” (18:18-19)

“...the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves.” (18:23)

End of parable: “So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.” (18:35)

“...there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone accept this who can.” (19:12)

“Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.” (19:14)

To his disciples: “...it will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again, I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” (19:23-24)

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard.” (20:1)

From the crowds: “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosannah in the highest heaven!” (21:9)

From Jesus: “Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?” The priests and elders argue with each other: “If we say, ‘From heaven’ he will then say to us, ‘Why did you not believe him?’” (21:25)

“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son.” (22:2)

In response to the Sadducees: “...in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels in heaven.” (22:30)

“...call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father – the one in heaven.” (23:9)

“But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you lock people out of the kingdom of heaven.” (23:13)

“Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom.” (25:1)

“I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.” (26:29)

To the high priest: “From now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.” (26:64)

After the resurrection: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” (28:18)

From Matthew’s accounts, two things are clear. First, when Jesus talks of heaven, he is talking about a place that is separate or different from this earthly realm. There is a clear sense of a distinctive physical place.

Second, Matthew's extensive use of the term 'kingdom of heaven' is not haphazard but deliberate. There has been much scholarly debate over whether the 'kingdom of God' described by the other three gospel writers refers to a kingdom taking place now on earth or in another realm yet to be experienced.

In Matthew, the answer is straightforward. By using the terminology 'kingdom of heaven' instead of 'kingdom of God', Matthew is clearly setting forth the view of a realm yet to be experienced by those on earth.

The words with which Matthew quotes Jesus are different from those of the other synoptic gospel writers. For example, Matthew's first beatitude is: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of *heaven*."¹⁹¹ The counterpart beatitude in Luke is: Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of *God*.¹⁹²

Not only do Matthew and Luke disagree about whether Jesus was referring to the poor in spirit versus just the plain poor, they disagree about what the nature of the kingdom. Matthew's "heaven" is from the Greek term *ouranos*, which also means sky or air. Luke uses "God" instead of heaven, quoted in the Greek as *theos*.

Or consider this comparison between the terminology of Matthew and Mark. Matthew's Jesus compares the kingdom of *heaven* to a mustard seed. For Mark as well Luke, the comparison of the mustard seed is to the kingdom of God.¹⁹³ Again, the Greek terminology is *ouranos* versus *theos*.

Lest there be any remaining confusion, terminology from a parable whose implications could be debated is sometimes followed by a clear description of a separate heavenly place. For example, Jesus saying that persons who humble themselves like children are the greatest in the kingdom of heaven is followed up by the statement: "Take care that you do not despise one of these little ones; for, I tell you, in heaven their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven."¹⁹⁴ There is no question but that this heaven is a place removed in space and consciousness from our earthly habitation.

Mark and Luke make far less use of the term "heaven", in large part because of their references to the "kingdom" as being "of God". Mark's first reference comes with the Pharisees asking Jesus for a "sign from heaven, to test him."¹⁹⁵ The second reference involves the crowd shouting: "Hosanna in the highest heaven."¹⁹⁶

¹⁹¹ Matthew 5:3.

¹⁹² Luke 6:20.

¹⁹³ The comparison to of the kingdom to a mustard seed can be found in Matthew 13:31, Mark 4:30-32 and Luke 13:18-19. The non-canonical Gospel of Thomas (Chapter 20) aligns with Matthew in making this comparison with the mustard seed, using the term "heaven" instead of "God."

¹⁹⁴ Matthew 18:3-4,10.

¹⁹⁵ Mark 8:11.

¹⁹⁶ Mark 11:10.

Mark's Jesus first makes use of the term comes in the admonition: "Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father in heaven may also forgive you for your trespasses."¹⁹⁷ Jesus next reference parallels Matthew, in responding to the question about marriage in heaven.¹⁹⁸

Jesus again refers to "angels in heaven" when discussing the concept that no one knows the time of the coming of the Son of Man.¹⁹⁹ And paralleling Matthew, before the high priests Jesus talks of the future coming of the Son of Man "with the clouds of heaven."²⁰⁰ Finally, after his resurrection, Mark's gospel (the longer ending) concludes with the account that Jesus was "taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God."²⁰¹

Luke's gospel makes far more use of heavenly references, but with a different emphasis than Matthew. Luke's first reference occurs at the birth of Christ with a heavenly host appearing to praise: "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors."²⁰² When done, the angels return to heaven.

At Jesus' baptism, a voice comes from heaven.²⁰³ Later, Jesus tells of the time of Elijah "when the heaven was shut up three years and six months" resulting in famine.²⁰⁴

The next mention occurs when the disciples ask Jesus if he wants to send fire "from heaven" to consume the Samaritans.²⁰⁵ Luke repeats Matthew's condemnation of Tyre and Sidon.²⁰⁶

When the 70 return from towns, Jesus tells them to "rejoice that your names are written in heaven."²⁰⁷ Then in a rejoicing mood, Jesus says: "I thank you Father, Lord of heaven and earth...."²⁰⁸

Unlike Matthew, Luke's version of the Lord's prayer starts: "Father, hallowed be your name, " omitting the "who art in heaven"²⁰⁹ But shortly thereafter, Jesus asks: "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"²¹⁰

¹⁹⁷ Mark 11:25.

¹⁹⁸ Mark 12:25.

¹⁹⁹ Mark 13:31-32.

²⁰⁰ Mark 14:62.

²⁰¹ Mark 16:19.

²⁰² Luke 2:14.

²⁰³ Luke 3:21.

²⁰⁴ Luke 4:25.

²⁰⁵ Luke 9:54.

²⁰⁶ Luke 10:15.

²⁰⁷ Luke 17:20.

²⁰⁸ Luke 17:21.

²⁰⁹ Luke 11:2.

²¹⁰ Luke 11:13.

Luke parallels Mark's passage about those asking for a "sign from heaven." (11:16) Later, Jesus suggests that his followers sell their possessions, yielding "an unfailing treasure in heaven."²¹¹ In the story of the prodigal son, the returning son humbles himself: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you...."²¹² And then in discussing the law, Jesus makes an unusual comparison: "...it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away, than for one stroke of a letter in the law to be dropped."²¹³

The parable of Abraham and Lazarus provides a metaphorical comparison of heaven and hell. The terminology used for Lazarus is that, after death, he was "carried away by the angels to be with Abraham."²¹⁴ Another parable compares a tax collector and a Pharisee at prayer, with the tax collector afraid to "even look up to heaven." (18:13)

In addressing a rich ruler, Jesus admonishes him to sell his possessions and give to the poor so that "you will have treasure in heaven."²¹⁵ Luke then parallels Mark's account of the crowd at Palm Sunday proclaiming: "Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven."²¹⁶

Before his death, like Mark, Luke's Jesus describes the future coming of the Son of Man, indicating that: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away."²¹⁷ In a text that may have been later added to earlier manuscripts, Jesus is assisted when at prayer in Gethsemane by "an angel from heaven."²¹⁸ And while hanging on the cross, only Luke has Jesus promising a criminal hanging next to him that: "...today you will be with me in Paradise."²¹⁹

As in Mark, Luke ends after the resurrection when Jesus "withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven."²²⁰

The gospel writer John is more oriented to heaven than Mark, but more circumspect than either Matthew or Luke. As in Mark, John's first reference to heaven occurs at Jesus' baptism, but in this account with John the Baptist testifying that: "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him."²²¹ Two days later, Jesus is calling disciples including Nathaniel. When Nathaniel expresses surprise that Jesus knew he had been under a fig tree, Jesus tells him there will be bigger surprises ahead: "Very

²¹¹ Luke 12:33.

²¹² Luke 15:21.

²¹³ Luke 16:17.

²¹⁴ Luke 16:22.

²¹⁵ Luke 18:22.

²¹⁶ Luke 19:38.

²¹⁷ Luke 21:33.

²¹⁸ Luke 22:43.

²¹⁹ Luke 23:43.

²²⁰ Luke 24:51.

²²¹ John 1:32.

truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”²²²

In his well known encounter with Nicodemus, Jesus makes a direct reference to heaven: “No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.” While not explicitly mentioning heaven, Jesus then goes on to provide perhaps the best known verse of the New Testament: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”²²³ Though not explicitly stated, the linkage is clear. Heaven is a place for eternal life.

Shortly thereafter, disciples of John the Baptist approach him express concern that many are going over to Jesus. John’s response: “No one can receive anything except what has been given from heaven.” John then goes on to say that Jesus “must increase, but I must decrease,” then adds: “The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks about earthly things. The one who comes from heaven is above all.”²²⁴

Jesus describes his Father as the one: “...who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” He goes on to say that: “...I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me.”²²⁵

John then records the Jews complaining about Jesus claim to be bread from heaven. Jesus concludes a response by stating: “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”²²⁶ Later Jesus repeats the same theme in a dialogue with scribes and Pharisees: “You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world.”²²⁷

To the disciples at John’s version of the last supper, Jesus talks extensively of heaven without mentioning the place by name: “In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places.... I go to prepare a place for you.”²²⁸ While not quite as opulent a description as the King James rendition of “many mansions,” John’s Jesus is clearly referring to heaven. Later that evening, Jesus “looked up to heaven” and then began to pray.²²⁹

²²² John 1:51.

²²³ John 3:13,16.

²²⁴ John 16:27-31.

²²⁵ John 6:32-33, 38.

²²⁶ John 6:51.

²²⁷ John 8:23.

²²⁸ John 14:2.

²²⁹ John 17:1.

John's last indirect reference to heaven occurs after Jesus' resurrection. Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene and cautions: "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father."²³⁰ Unlike Mark and Luke, John does not mention the subsequent ascension, but John seems in implicit agreement that this is what happens.

James & Paul: In contrast with gospel writers and then Paul, James is concerned almost exclusively with earthly matters. The only reference to heaven comes in the form of an oath rather than any affirmation of heaven as an eternal reward. Speaking of personal commitments, James declares: "Above all, my beloved, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your 'Yes' by yeas and your 'No' be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation."²³¹

Although James does not directly invoke heaven in any other way, his letter seems to support the notion of an eternal reward: "Blessed is anyone who endures temptation. Such a one has stood the test and will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him."²³²

The apostle Paul claims no direct revelation from Christ as to what heaven is all about. Yet Paul's letters contain numerous references to heaven. Here is a listing of those references:

"...the righteousness that comes from faith says, 'Do not say in your heart, Who will ascend into heaven?' (That is, to bring Christ down) or 'Who will descend into the abyss?' (That is, to bring Christ up from the dead)." (Romans 10:6-7)

"The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven." (Romans 15:47-49)

"For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling..." (2 Corinthians 5:1-2)

Paul writing of himself: "I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven -- whether in the body or out of the body, I do not know; God knows." (2 Cor. 12:2)

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places." (Ephesians 1:3)

²³⁰ John 20:17.

²³¹ James 5:12.

²³² James 1:12.

“...he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.” (Eph. 1:9-10)

“God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places.” (Eph. 1:20)

“...so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth.” (Philippians 2:10)

“But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Phil. 3:20)

“...for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible...” (Colossians 1:16)

“Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, for you know that you also have a Master in heaven.” (Col 4:1)

“...to wait for his Son from heaven -- whom he raised from the dead -- Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming.” (I Thessalonians 1:10)

“For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call and with the sound of god’s trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first.” (I Thess. 4:16)

“The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and save me for his heavenly kingdom.” (2 Timothy 4:18)

Like the Gospel writers, Paul also speaks repeatedly of “eternal life” in a context clearly linked to heaven. In Romans, for example, Paul writes: “For he will repay according to each one’s deeds; to those who by patiently doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life.”²³³ Later in this same epistle: “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”²³⁴

Non-Canonical Gospels: The Gospel of Thomas opens not with a vision of heaven, but a parallel statement: “Whoever discovers the interpretation of these sayings will not taste death.”²³⁵ There are more direct references as when Jesus says: “Don’t lie, and don’t do what you hate, because all things are disclosed before heaven.”²³⁶ Later, Jesus says: “This

²³³ Romans 2:6-7.

²³⁴ Romans 6:23.

²³⁵ Thomas 1.

²³⁶ Thomas 6:2.

heaven will pass away, and the one above it will pass away. The dead are not alive, and the living will not die.”²³⁷

Using a term comparable to Matthew, the disciples ask what “Heaven’s imperial rule” is like. Jesus responds with the parable of the mustard seed.²³⁸ And in a passage found in all three synoptics, Jesus states that “whoever blasphemes against the holy spirit will not be forgiven, either on earth or in heaven.”²³⁹

This time, reminiscent of Luke: “Congratulations to the poor, for to you belongs Heaven’s domain.”²⁴⁰ And then, the Gospel of Thomas ends on this note: “For every female who makes herself male will enter the domain of Heaven.”²⁴¹

Other non-canonical books of the New Testament are full of references to heaven:

“I swear to you, no one will ever enter heaven’s domain at my bidding, but rather because you yourselves are full.” (Secret Book of James 2:6)

“Don’t let heaven’s domain wither away. For it is like a date palm shoot whose fruit fell down around it.” (Secret James 6:9)

“So it is possible for you, too, to receive for yourselves heaven’s domain; unless you receive it through knowledge, you will not be able to discover it.” (Secret James 6:18)

“Congratulations to those who have envisioned themselves as the fourth one in heaven.” (7:9)

“For heaven’s domain is like a head of grain which sprouted in a field....” (8:3)

“Don’t let heaven’s domain become desolate among you. Don’t be arrogant about the light that enlightens.” (8:11)

Peter comments: “Sometimes you urge us on toward heaven’s domain, yet at other times you turn us away.” (9:1)

“...having opened your hears, listen to the hymns that await me up in heaven. For today I must take my place at the right hand of my Father.” (9:9-10)

²³⁷ Thomas 11:1-2.

²³⁸ Thomas 20.

²³⁹ Thomas 44.

²⁴⁰ Thomas 54.

²⁴¹ Thomas 114:2.

“When he said this he went away. So Peter and I knelt down, gave thanks, and sent our hearts up to heaven.... Heavenly majesties were singing hymns.... We also desired to send our spirits heavenward to the majesty.” (10:1-5)

“And I say to you, be always in heaven....” (Dialogue of the Savior 1:2)

“Judas said, ‘Tell [us L]ord, what [there was] before heaven and earth came into being.’ The Lord said, ‘There was darkness and water and a spirit upon <the> wa[ter]’” (Dialogue9:2)

“That which supports the ear[th] is that which supports the heaven. When a word comes forth from the Majesty, it will come upon that which supports the heaven and the earth.” (15:4-5)

“Mary said, ‘[Of wha]t kind is this mustard seed? Is it from heaven or from earth?’ The Lord said, ‘when the Father established the world for himself, he left many things with the Mother of All.’” (36:1-2)

“And the soul said, ‘Why do you judge me, since I have not passed judgment? I am bound, but I have not bound. They did not recognize me, but I have recognized that the universe is to be dissolved, both the things of earth and those of heaven.’” (Gospel of Mary 9:13-15)

“And Mary (as a youth) lived in the temple of the Lord. She was fed there like a dove, receiving her food from the hand of a heavenly messenger.” (Infancy James 8:2)

“A heavenly messenger suddenly stood before her: ‘Don’t be afraid, Mary. You see, you’ve find favor in the sight of the Lord of all. You will conceive by means of his word.’” (Infancy James 11:5)

“...when Christ wanted to come to earth, the Good Father summoned a might power in the heavens who was called Michael, and entrusted Christ to his care.” (The Gospel of the Hebrews 1:1)

Regarding: “....the problem of explaining how it is possible for the ‘mother’ of Christ to be the holy spirit which came into existence through the Logos. But those things are not difficult to explain. For if ‘whoever does the will of the heavenly father is hi brother and sister and mother,’ and if the name ‘brother of Christ’ applies not only to humans, but also to beings of a more divine rank, there is nothing absurd in the holy spirit being his mother, when anyone who does the will of the heavenly father is called ‘mother of Christ.’ ” (Gospel of Hebrews 4a)

“The time when Satan is in power has run its course, but other terrible things are just around the corner. I was put to death for the sake of those who sinned, so they might return to the truth and stop sinning, and thus inherit the spiritual and indestructible righteous glory that is in heaven.” (An episode found directly after

Mark 16:14 found in a single known manuscript Codex Washingtonianus otherwise known as the Freer Logion)

Heaven in Summary: The topic of heaven is attested to by every major New Testament canonical writer and by a number of the non-canonical gospels as well. No writer gives a complete picture of what heaven is about.

The subject is further confused by Matthew and Thomas' use of the term "kingdom of heaven" rather than "kingdom of God". In short, heaven gets much press, but little illumination. We are left to wait and speculate.

14. Hell

Biblical use of the term "hell" is on a downward trend. The King James version of the entire Bible contains 54 references to "hell" in 54 verses. The contemporary but paraphrased Living Bible upped the count to 66 occurrences with 65 verses. However, the New King James (NKJV) has only 32 references in 32 verses. The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) has even fewer – 15 in 15.

In part, western fear of hell can be attributed to definitive statements in the Bible. However, in major measure we can also thank the theologians of the early church – who shaped images that have persisted for centuries.

Chief among the "hell-spinners" was St. Augustine of the early fifth century. He describes damnation to hell succinctly in this manner:

For from that fire no man shall be saved, because they all shall go away into eternal punishment, where their worms shall not die, nor their fire be quenched, in which they shall be tormented day and night for ever.²⁴²

While Dante's *The Inferno* also expresses orthodox sentiments, there is also a recognition of the seeming injustice of hell. The Roman poet Virgil (from the pre-Christian era of Caesar Augustus) leads the medieval Dante through hell. Not far from the outset of their journey, Virgil inquires of Dante:

You do not ask about the souls you see? I want you to know, before you venture farther, they did not sin. Though they have merit, that is not enough, for they were unbaptized, denied the gateway to the faith that you profess. And if they lived before the Christians lived, they did not worship God aright. And among these I am one. For such defects, and for no other fault, we are lost, and afflicted but in this, that without hope we live in longing.²⁴³

²⁴² Augustine, *The City of God*, XXI.26.

²⁴³ Dante, *The Inferno*, IV. 31-42.

For Augustine, Dante, and for centuries of Catholics (as well as Protestants), hell is a place of physical torment. It is for people and fallen angels. The punishment, the despair, is never ending.

Our question is narrow: is this what Christ taught? Or have western conceptions of hell developed more from sources separate from Jesus?

Our primary focus is on the New Testament. The King James edition of the New Testament contains 21 separate references (in 23 verses) to “hell”. Of these 14 are found in the gospel accounts, with 2 references in Acts, one each in James and 2 Peter and three in Revelation.

Hell Defined: The King James uses the word “hell” as an all-encompassing term for three distinct words found in early Bible manuscripts. *Gehenna* is derived from a Hebrew phrase for the “valley of Hinnom,” a ravine running west and south of Jerusalem. Gehenna served as the garbage dump for Jerusalem and was virtually always on fire.²⁴⁴

Hades is the Greek term for the place or abode to which all people go upon death. In contrast, Hell is derived from a later Teutonic word *Hel*, the name of the goddess of the infernal regions.

Tartaros is a term used far less frequently. The word Tartaros is a variation on the Greek (Tartaroo) which is translated as to cast down into hell.

Also applied in the New Testament and more often in the Old Testament is an earlier Hebrew word similar in meaning to the Greek Hades. *Sheol* is a Hebrew term which has been interpreted to mean not only the underworld abode of the dead, but which also can be interpreted as a pit or grave.²⁴⁵ Sheol finds its application exclusively in the Old Testament, with no references in the New Testament.²⁴⁶

Sheol is clearly contrasted with heaven. For example, in addressing a king of Judah, the prophet Isaiah relays this message from the Lord: “Ask a sign of the LORD your god; let it be as deep as Sheol or as high as heaven.”²⁴⁷

Gospel Accounts: Because Matthew provides the most uses of various terms for hell (i.e. 8 references), that is where we start:

²⁴⁴ Prior to its use as Jerusalem’s garbage dump, the Valley of Hinnom was a site notorious for pagan infanticide. During the reigns of Ahaz and Manasseh, human sacrifices were offered to the Ammonite god Molech. Later Josiah desecrated the valley with pagan worship.

²⁴⁵ The *Analytical Concordance to the Bible*, 22nd American edition, cites 65 uses of the term “Sheol” in the Old and New Testaments. Meanings are assigned as hell (31 times), grave (31 times) and pit (1 use).

²⁴⁶ The first Old Testament use of Sheol translated as “hell” (KJ) occurs in Deuteronomy: “For a fire is kindled by my anger, and burns to the depths of Sheol; it devours the earth and its increase, and sets on fire the foundations of the mountains.” (32:22, NRSV) Earlier KJ interpretations of Sheol as “grave” occur, the first in Genesis: “No, I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning.” (37:35, NRSV)

²⁴⁷ Isaiah 7:11.

“But I tell you: those who are angry with a companion will be brought before a tribunal. And those who say to a companion, ‘You moron,’ will be subject to the sentence of the court. And whoever says, ‘You idiot’, deserves the fires of Gehenna.” (5:22)

“And if your right eye gets you into trouble, rip it out and throw it away! You would be better off to lose a part of your body, than to have your whole body thrown into Gehenna. And if your right hand gets you into trouble, cut it off and throw it away! You would be better off to lose a part of your body, than to have your whole body wind up in Gehenna.” (5:29-30)

“Don’t fear those who kill the whole body but cannot kill the soul; instead, you ought to fear the one who can destroy both the soul and the body in Gehenna.” (10:28)

“And you, Capernaum, you don’t think you’ll be exalted to heaven, do you? No, you’ll go to Hell (Hades).” (11:23)

“Let me tell you, you are Peter, ‘the Rock’, and on this very rock I will build my congregation, and the gates of Hades will not be able to overpower it.” (16:18)

“And if your right eye gets you into trouble, rip it out and throw it away! It’s better for you to enter life one-eyed than to be thrown into Gehenna’s fire.” (18:9)

“You scholars and Pharisees, you impostors! Damn you! You scour land and sea to make one convert, and when you do, you make that person more of a child of Hell (Gehenna) than you are.” (23:15)

“You serpents! You spawn of Satan! How are you going to escape Hell’s (Gehenna’s) judgment?” (23:33)

Of Matthew’s eight references to hell, six are derived from the Hebrew *Gehenna* and two from the Greek term *Hades*. Of course, Matthew and other gospels make other references to Hell without direct use of the term. For example, as part of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus proclaims:

Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?’ Then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers.’²⁴⁸

²⁴⁸ Matthew 7:21-23. A similar passage (though with different details) is found at Luke 13:25-28. Luke’s passage refers to “weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves are thrown out.”

Explaining to his disciples the parable of the weeds of the field, Jesus is at his most cryptic:

Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be *weeping and gnashing of teeth*.²⁴⁹

In the parable of the ten talents, Jesus condemns the slave who buried his money in the ground, earning no return on investment:

You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. As for this worthless slave, throw him *into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth*.²⁵⁰

Whether this is hell or not, Jesus does not directly say. But with “weeping and gnashing of teeth,” the place sounds similar to what we today popularly conceive of as hell.

And in an apocalyptic discourse with the disciples prior to his arrest, Jesus ends with these observations regarding those who will not take care of persons who are hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison. “Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me. And these will go away *into eternal punishment*, but the righteous into eternal life.”²⁵¹

Neither of these damning passages have a counterpart in Mark or Luke. Both of Matthew’s synoptic counterparts talk more sparingly of hell and in terms considerably less stark than those of the first gospel.

The Gospel of Mark provides only three instances of terminology for hell. All three are found in Chapter 9, relating to offenses of the hand, foot and eye. The foot is a variation that Matthew does not have. And rather than repeating the phrase “lose a part of your body, than to have your whole body thrown” for all body parts, Mark is more specific

²⁴⁹ Matthew 13:40-42.

²⁵⁰ Matthew 25:26-30. A parallel passage is found at Luke 19:12-27; however in Luke Jesus ends the parable by saying that “as for those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them – bring them here and slaughter them in my presence.” Luke’s passage has no weeping and gnashing of teeth.

²⁵¹ Matthew 25:46. Jesus begins this discussion of the end of the age by talking of how the shepherd will separate the sheep from the goats. There are no parallels to this passage or to Matthew 13:40-42 found in either Mark or Luke.

saying, for example with the hand: “It’s better for you to enter life maimed than to wind up in Gehenna, in the unquenchable fire, with both hands!”²⁵²

Mark’s Jesus also adds a saying from Isaiah:

... it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, *where their worm never dies*, and the fire is never quenched.²⁵³

The term “where their worm never dies” refers to the Old and New Testament observation that worms were always present in Jerusalem’s rubbish dump of Gehenna. The worms lived on even though the rubbish was perpetually burning.²⁵⁴

Luke also uses terminology for Hell three times, albeit different than Mark. The first use is similar (though more abbreviated) than Matthew’s condemnation of Capernaum.²⁵⁵

The next two references are unique to Luke. Before a crowd of “many thousands”, Jesus suggests: “I tell you, my friends, don’t fear those who kill the body, and after that can do no more. I’ll show you whom you ought to fear; fear the one who can kill and than has authority to cast into Gehenna.”²⁵⁶

And then we have Luke’s parable of the poor man Lazarus and the rich man. The rich man dies and: “From Hades, where he was being tortured, he looked up and saw Abraham a long way off and Lazarus with him.”

Outside of Revelation, this parable provides the only New Testament picture (however short) of what hell may be about. The rich man describes Hades as a place of torment and flames, and asks for Lazarus to come and dip the tongue of his finger to cool the rich man’s tongue. Interestingly, Hades is also described as a place from which one can see the other side in which Abraham and Lazarus reside. However, the divide is rugged “so that even those who want to cross over from here to you cannot, and no one can cross over from that side to ours.”²⁵⁷

²⁵² Mark 9:43.

²⁵³ Mark 9:47-48.

²⁵⁴ The KJV uses the expression of the worm three times in this passage; the NRSV consolidates this to one reference. The Old Testament passage cited by Jesus in Mark is from Isaiah 66:24 and reads as follows: “And they shall go out and look at the dead bodies of the people who have rebelled against me; for their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.” For Isaiah, this same valley (of Hinnom) was a place for human as well as household remains.

Centuries after Isaiah, Augustine would use the worm as part of his proof that life can exist through perpetual fire. From Augustine’s *The City of God*, 21:9.

²⁵⁵ Luke 10:15.

²⁵⁶ Luke 12:4-5.

²⁵⁷ Luke 16:23-26.

There is one other passage in Luke that warrants consideration. Though hell is not mentioned by name, the reference is clear – and worth considering in its entirety. Jesus is on the road and responding to a question: “‘Lord, will only a few be saved?’” Jesus’ response is telling:

Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able. When once the owner of the house has got up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, ‘Lord, open to us,’ then in reply he will say to you, ‘I do not know where you come from.’ Then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.’ But he will say, ‘I do not know where you come from; go away from me, all you evildoers!’ There will be *weeping and gnashing of teeth* when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrown out. Then people will come from east and west, from north and south, and will eat in the kingdom of God. Indeed, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.²⁵⁸

John’s gospel never once uses any of the Hebrew or Greek terms for hell. John’s Jesus clearly espoused some form of condemnation – but whether this is to a place like hell is not clear from the text.

In the well known passage of John 3, Jesus states “that everyone who believes in him (the Son) *may not perish* but have eternal life”. He goes on to say: “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

To make sure his listener (Nicodemus) does not miss the point, Jesus restates the proposition even more strongly: “Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God.”

So what is the condemnation? Well, not necessarily a place called hell. Here, instead, is Jesus follow-on thought: “And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.”²⁵⁹

About as close as the Jesus of John’s gospel comes to the notion of a place for the damned comes later as he is criticized for healing on the Sabbath. Jesus starts by commenting on the primacy of doing good despite the rules of Judaism, then continues to make a broader point, stating that:

For just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself; and he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not be astonished at this; for the hour is coming when all who

²⁵⁸ Luke 13:24-30.

²⁵⁹ John 3:16-19.

are in their graves will hear his voice and will come out—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to *the resurrection of condemnation*.²⁶⁰

Is this condemnation hell? Or is it something else? The Jesus of John never quite reveals his hand.

James & Paul: Jesus brother makes one use of the term hell in the epistle attributed to James. That statement comes in the context of describing the excesses of the human tongue: “The tongue is placed among our members as a world of iniquity; it stains the whole body, sets on fire the cycle of nature, and is itself set on fire by hell (Gehenna)”²⁶¹

In sharp contrast to the synoptics and James, Paul follows John in not referring directly to any of the terms for hell. Both John and Paul talk of judgment, but neither identifies hell as the necessary or logical result of that judgment.

The apostle Paul is no more helpful than John in describing his views of judgment (without any direct recourse to hell). For example, writing to the Romans, Paul states: “For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.”²⁶² Paul goes on to say that “every knee shall bow” and “every tongue shall give praise” but does not mention what happens to those who will be judged harshly.

Similarly, to the Corinthians, Paul writes: “For all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body whether for good or evil.”²⁶³ Again, Paul does not go on to explain what is in store for those who do evil.

And to the Galatians: “...if anyone proclaims to you a gospel contrary to what you received, let that one be accursed.”²⁶⁴ Paul is more direct in his condemnation, but no less evasive by not detailing the consequences.

Other New Testament Accounts: Luke also makes reference to the place of Hell in the Acts of the Apostles. In his Pentecostal address to a large crowd, Luke recounts the apostle Peter twice quoting King David, first: “For you will not abandon my soul to

²⁶⁰ John 5:25-29.

²⁶¹ James 2:4.

²⁶² Romans 14:10.

²⁶³ II Corinthians 5:10.

²⁶⁴ Galatians 1:9. The NIV uses the stronger statement of “let him be eternally condemned.” However, footnotes indicate that the Greek word (anathema) originally referred to a pagan temple offering in payment for a vow, which later came to represent a curse.

Hades.”²⁶⁵ Again, Peter paraphrases David: “He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh experience corruption.”²⁶⁶

Reference also is made by Peter (or a successor) in the book of II Peter as follows: “For if God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell (Tartaros) and committed them to chains of deepest darkness to be kept until the judgment...”²⁶⁷

If there is a canonical New Testament source from which the modern conception of hell has been forged, it is most likely from the book of the Apocalypse (or Revelation). Consider the most explicit text:

And the sea gave up the dead that were in it. Death and *Hades* gave up the dead that were in them, and all were judged according to what they had done. Then Death and *Hades* were thrown into the *lake of fire*. This is the second death, the lake of fire; and anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the *lake of fire*.”²⁶⁸

Revelation creates searing images of hell as a lake of fire. Other passages describe the keys to hell and a horse rider of death followed with hell.

Non-Canonical Gospels: If the canon is of little help (except perhaps for Revelation) in describing the experience and the occupants of hell, can we expect more help from the non-canonical accounts? The answer is some, but not much.

The Gospel of Thomas is of little immediate help, because the concept of hell is never introduced. Like the apostles John and Paul, Thomas can talk of condemnation without specifying an abode for its receipt. For example, Thomas’ Jesus echoes all three synoptics in saying “...whoever blasphemes against the holy spirit will not be forgiven, either on earth or in heaven.”²⁶⁹

The concluding phrase “either on earth or in heaven” is unique to Thomas. The only close parallel is in Matthew, which reads “...either in this age or the one to come.”²⁷⁰ Thomas’ distinctive use of the conjunctive “earth or heaven” leaves no apparent room for a third alternative – hell.

²⁶⁵ Acts 2:27. This is a Greek translation of David’s thankfulness expressed in Psalms 16:10, “For you do not give me up to Sheol.”

²⁶⁶ From Acts 2:28. In both verses, Luke uses the term Hades as a translation of the earlier Hebrew from the Psalms of Sheol. Interestingly, while both the King James (KJ) and New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) use the word “hell” in Psalm 16, the New International Version (NIV) has translated Sheol as “grave”.

²⁶⁷ II Peter 2:4. The word Tartaros is a variation on the Greek (Tartaroo) which is translated as to cast down into hell.

²⁶⁸ Revelation 20:13-15. The two other direct references to Hell in Revelation are found at 1:18 and 6:8; both of these references are translated by the NRSV.

²⁶⁹ Thomas 44:3.

²⁷⁰ Matthew 12:32, SV.

The Dialogue of the Savior also does not mention hell by name, but does comment on “...the place where [there will] be weeping and gnashing of teeth concerning the and of a[ll] these things.”²⁷¹ The Dialogue also provides an account of Jesus taking Judas and Matthew and Mary to “...the end of heaven [and] earth.” The sight: “Judas lifted his eyes and saw a place of great height, and he saw the abyss below.” Judas describes the abyss as a place of “great fire there, and great terror.”²⁷²

There is a passage from an excerpt of an otherwise unknown narrative gospel (now called Gospel Oxyrhynchus 840) that discusses future treatment of the damned without mentioning hell by name. While brief, the discussion is as graphic as any in the canonized New Testament: “After all, those who commit crimes against humanity not only get <their due> in this life, they also will have to endure punishment and repeated torture <in the next life>.” (1:1)

Hell Summarized: The number of gospel references to hell are far less numerous than those related to heaven, but are often more ambiguous. At times Hell is the equivalent of Jerusalem’s ever-burning garbage dump—Gehenna. In some places, the Greek term for the underworld of Hades is applied.

The Old Testament version of hell – Sheol – is never used in the New Testament except for the occasion when it is loosely translated as Hades. And recent translations of Sheol make it increasingly clear that this place of the deep is not necessarily the same type of place as Gehenna or Hades or Tartaros.

The apostle John does not mention hell in his gospel and references to hell in the writings of Paul are nowhere to be found. Nowhere with the possible exception of Luke’s parable of the rich man and Lazarus is there any semblance of a description for the abode of the damned. Nor is there a clear message provided as to whether consignment to Hell is intended to be of temporary or eternal duration.

If Jesus intended for hell to be perceived as more than a metaphor for Jerusalem’s garbage dump, he did not do a good job of articulating the concept. The closest he came was his tale of Lazarus – the kind of hell where one could see directly across to heaven. Unfortunately, Jesus’ successors of the early church – notably Paul – were of little additional help.

Arriving at a full appreciation of hell would take a few centuries, the melding of Christian thought with Greek and Roman terms, and the influence of church writers ranging from Augustine to Dante.

²⁷¹ Dialogue of the Savior 8:8.

²⁷² Dialogue 17:1-4.

15. Kingdom of God at Hand

The term “kingdom of God” has long been a source of confusion. As previously indicated, the term “kingdom of God” is not even uniformly applied by all four gospel writers. In particular, Matthew typically substitutes “kingdom of heaven” for God in most passages that are also common to Mark and Luke.

Interpretations can vary depending on the translation. For example, the Scholars Version has substituted the term “God’s imperial rule” for the Kingdom of God. When the term is used in a spatial (place-oriented) context, the word “God’s domain” is often applied.

Beyond terminology is the question of the time period implied. Is the kingdom of God to be experienced in the hereafter, or in the here and now?

This is the question that is the primary focus of this topic. Is the kingdom truly at hand?

Gospel Accounts: As noted in the earlier discussion of heaven, Matthew’s use of the term “kingdom of heaven” appears to be more oriented to the future rather than to the here and now. In those few instances where Matthew substitutes “kingdom of God,” it is worth paying attention.

One exception is provided by Matthew when Jesus says: “But if is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the *kingdom of God has come* to you.”²⁷³ In contrast with a kingdom of heaven that is future oriented, in this case the kingdom of God clearly is occurring in the present.

A second exception of interest comes with the rich man desiring “eternal life.” At first, Jesus says: “Truly I tell you, it will be hard for a rich person to enter the *kingdom of heaven*.” Then, in the next verse, Matthew’s terminology shifts: “Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the *kingdom of God*.”²⁷⁴

Does Matthew’s Jesus intentionally shift from future to present with this change in terminology? If there is an answer, it may be that Jesus is speaking of *both present and future* as indicated by the discussion with the disciples that then ensues. Jesus concludes this discussion with the comment that: “...everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or field, for my name’s sake, will receive an hundredfold, and will inherit eternal life.”²⁷⁵ The “hundredfold” appears to connect with the added extended family of believers with which one becomes connected in this life, while “eternal life” clearly indicates that which is yet to come (after death).

²⁷³ Matthew 12:28.

²⁷⁴ Matthew 19:23-24.

²⁷⁵ Matthew 19:29.

For Mark and particularly Luke, the kingdom of God takes on far greater significance. This can be seen by a recitation of the *Lukan passages* that apply this terminology:

“I must proclaim the good new of the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose.” (4:43)

“Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.” (6:20)

“I tell you, among those born of women no one is greater than John; yet the least in the kingdom of god is greater than he.” (7:28)

“Soon afterwards, he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God.” (8:1)

To the disciples: “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God.” (8:10)

Commission to 12 disciples: “... he sent them to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal.” (9:2)

To the crowds, he “...spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed to be cured.” (9:11)

To all of the disciples: “But truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God.” (9:27)

“Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God...” “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” (9:60-62)

“...cure the sick who are there, and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ but whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, ‘Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.’” (10:9-11)

“Father, hallowed be your name, Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread...” (11:2-3)

“Every kingdom divided against itself becomes a desert, and house falls on house. If Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand?...But if it is by the finger of god that I cast out the demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you” (11:17-20)

“What is the kingdom of God like? And to what should I compare it? It is like a mustard seed....It is like yeast that a woman took” (13:18-21)

“There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrown out. Then people will come from east and west, from north and south, and will eat in the kingdom of God.” (13:28-29)

A dinner guest to Jesus: “Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!” (14:15) Note: this comment is followed by Jesus parable of the Great Dinner.

“The law and the prophets were in effect until John came; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is proclaimed, and everyone tries to enter it by force.” (16:16)

Once Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, and he answered, “The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed, nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There it is!’ For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you.” (17:20-21)

“Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” (18:16-17)

“How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” (18:24-25) ²⁷⁶

To the disciples, Jesus tells a parable (of the Ten Pounds) because, as they neared Jerusalem, “they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately.” (19:11)

“Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. so also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place.” (21:29-32)

“I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God....Take this (cup) and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” (22:15-18) ²⁷⁷

²⁷⁶ In contrast with Matthew, Luke uses the term “kingdom of God” both times. However, like Matthew, Luke makes it clear that there is no one who gives up family for the kingdom “who will not get back very much more in this age, and the age to come eternal life.” Matthew 18:29-30.

²⁷⁷ These comments are followed by breaking of the loaf and passing of the cup.

To the disciples: “You are those who have stood by me in my trials; and I confer on you, just as my Father has conferred on me, a kingdom, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” (22:28-30)

The criminal hanging beside Jesus: “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” He (Jesus) replied, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.” (23:42-43)

“Now there was a good and righteous man named Joseph, who, though a member of the council, had not agreed to their plan of action. He came from the Jewish town of Arimathea, and he was waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God.” (23:50-51)

Mark makes more sparing mention of the kingdom than does Luke, but *Mark's references* are just as rooted in the here and now. Passages unique to Mark are:

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

“The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how.” (4:26-27)

“And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell (Gehenna).” (9:47)²⁷⁸

John makes even more sparing use of kingdom terminology. However, in sharp contrast with Mark and Luke, *John's kingdom* is far more other-worldly and perhaps somewhat more future tense:

To Nicodemus: “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above....no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.” (3:3-5)

To Pilate: “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.” (18:36)

James & Paul: Somewhat surprisingly, James gives relatively little play to the kingdom. His one reference occurs as part of the admonition not to discriminate between rich and poor: “Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the

²⁷⁸) Matthew has a similar passage, but with no reference to the kingdom of God.

kingdom that he has promised to those who love him?”²⁷⁹ For James, the kingdom appears more future oriented, as it passes to the heirs.

The apostle Paul also makes relatively sparing use of the “kingdom of God.” However, even more than John the apostle, Paul is adamant that the kingdom occurs in the future and is oriented to the spiritual rather than the material world:

“For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” (Romans 14:17)

“For the kingdom of God depends not on talk but on power. Which would you prefer? Am I to come to you with a stick, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?” (I Corinthians 4:20-21)

“Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers -- none of these will inherit the kingdom of God.” (I Cor. 6:9-10)

“What I am saying, brothers and sisters, is this: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of god, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.” (I Cor. 15:50)

Non-Canonical Gospels: When surveying the non-canonical gospels, one can not help but be struck by the number of references to the kingdom or imperial rule of God. As noted, the *Scholar’s Version* (SV) consistently translates the kingdom terminology used by translations such as the KJ, NIV and NRSV as the “God’s imperial rule” or “God’s domain.”

Starting with the Gospel of Thomas:

“The <Father’s> *imperial rule* is inside you and outside you. When you know yourselves, then you will be known, and you will understand that you are children of the living Father.” (3:3-4)

The disciples to Jesus: “Tell us what Heaven’s imperial rule is like.” Jesus: “It’s like a mustard seed....” (20:1-2)

Jesus sees babies nursing: “These nursing babies are like those who enter the <Father’s> domain.” The disciples: “Then how shall we enter the <Father’s> domain as babies?” Jesus: “When you make the two into one, and when you make the inner like the outer and the outer like the inner, and the upper like the lower, and when you make male and female into a single one, so that the male will not be female nor the female be female, when you make eyes in place of and eye, a

²⁷⁹ James 2:5.

hand in place of a hand, a foot in place of a foot, an image in place of an image, then you will enter [the <father's> domain]." (22:1-7)

"Congratulations to those who are alone and chose, for you will find the <Father's> domain. For you have come from it, and you will return there again." (49)

"Congratulations to the poor, for to you belongs Heaven's domain." (54)

"The Father's imperial rule is like a person who had [good] seed...." (57)

"The Father's imperial rule is like a merchant who had a supply of merchandise and then found a pearl...." (76)

"Whoever is near me is near the fire, and whoever is far from me is far from the <Father's> domain." (82)

"The Father's imperial rule is like [a] woman who took a little leaven, [hid] it in dough and made it into two large loaves of bread...." (96)

"The [Father's] imperial rule is like a woman who was carrying a [jar]full of meal. While she was walking along [a] distant road, the handle of the jar broke and the meal spilled behind her [along] the road. She didn't know it; she hadn't noticed a problem. When she reached her house, she put the jar down and discovered that it was empty." (97)

"The Father's imperial rule is like a person who wanted to kill someone powerful. While still at home he drew his sword and thrust it into the wall to find out whether his hand would go in. then he killed the powerful one too." (98)

To the disciples notifying Jesus of the presence of his mother and brothers:
"Those who do what my Father wants are my brothers and my mother. They are the ones who will enter my Father's domain." (99:2)

"The <Father's> imperial rule is like a shepherd who had a hundred sheep. One of them, the largest, went astray. He left the ninety-nine and looked for the one until he found it. After he had toiled, he said to the sheep, "I love you more than the ninety-nine." (107)

"The <Father's> imperial rule is like a person who had a treasure hidden in his field but did not know it. And [when] he died he left it to his [son]. The son [did] not know <about it either>. He took over the field and sold it. The buyer went plowing, [discovered] the treasure, and began to lend money at interest to whomever he wished." (109)

The disciples: "When will the <Father's> imperial rule come?" Jesus: "It will not come by watching for it. It will not be said, 'Look, here!' or 'Look, there!'

Rather, the Father's imperial rule is spread out upon the earth, and people don't see it." (113)

"For every female who makes herself male will enter the domain of Heaven."
(114)

One other non-canonical gospel is also replete with references to God's imperial domain. This is the Secret Book of James:

"Congratulations to those who have not been sick, and have experienced relief before they became sick. God's domain belongs to you!" (3:10)

"God's domain belongs to those who have believed in my cross." (5:2)

"Don't let God's domain wither away. For it is like a date palm shoot whose fruit fell down around it." (6:9-10)

"Do you think, then, that many have found heaven's domain? Congratulations to those who have envisioned themselves as the fourth one in heaven." (7:9)

"For heaven's domain is like a head of grain which sprouted in a field." (8:3)

"Don't let heaven's domain become desolate among you. Don't be arrogant about the light that enlightens." (8:11-12)

Peter: "Sometimes you urge us on toward heaven's domain, yet at other times you turn us away." Jesus: "...even though you are elated over [the] promise of life, you still despair and become distressed when you are taught about heaven's domain."
(9:1-3)

The author of the Secret Book of James may be speaking for many when quoting Jesus as identifying with our becoming "distressed when you are taught about heaven's domain." Though Jesus may understand the distress of Peter and others to follow, he does not seem inclined to make the learning process any easier.

Kingdom Imminency Summarized: The kingdom of God turns up repeatedly throughout both canonical and non-canonical literature. Yet there is no clear consensus – biblical or otherwise – as to what and when this kingdom, this imperial rule is to be made manifest.

The gospels of Luke and Mark clearly place the kingdom in the realm of the here and now. Matthew and John place the kingdom more in the future – an experience that is beyond what we can expect to experience on earth. The non-canonical writer of Thomas lines up clearly with Luke; the apostle Paul with Matthew. James – both the New Testament epistle and the non-canonical Secret Gospel – appears to fall somewhere in-between.

16. Message Ambivalence

For two millennia, theological and doctrinal debates over the life, teachings and actions of Jesus have been predicated on the notion that there is one truth. The truth is perceived to be either one choice or its counterpart, but not both.

Consequently, seeming conflicts may be ignored or receive an explanation to resolve the apparent contradiction. The contradictions may be of two types: (a) between different authors; and/or (b) by the same author.

Gospel Accounts: Type (a) conflicts are explored through review of the other topics covered by this book. A classic illustration is provided by Matthew's "Blessed are the poor in spirit" versus Luke's "Blessed are the poor."

This section on *message ambivalence* focuses on Type (b) conflicts – within the writing(s) of a single author. Virtually all of the New Testament gospels and some of the non-canonical writings exhibit these internal tensions; the New Testament writings of Paul and James generally do not.

The following chart illustrates a selected inventory of some of the more readily apparent conflicts in the teachings of Jesus. These conflicts are portrayed in terms of the contrast between a *softer* versus *harder* Jesus – much like a *good cop/bad cop* routine.

We start with Mark's gospel – rife with inconsistencies of the master.

Mark & Conflicting Statements of Jesus

| Theme | Softer Jesus | Harder Jesus |
|---|---|--|
| Present vs. Future Kingdom | "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." (1:15) | "Truly, I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God." (14:25) |
| Forbearance vs. Judgement | "Let us go on to the neighboring town, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do." (1:38) "Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses." (11:25) | "Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them." (6:11) |
| Going for Saved vs. Unsaved | "I have come to call not the righteous but sinners." (2:17) | "He is God not of the dead, but of the living..." (12:27) |
| Keeping vs. breaking the Sabbath | "The Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath..." (2:27) | "You know the commandments..." (10:19) <i>Note:</i> the commandment regarding the Sabbath is not explicitly cited. |
| Witness vs. Silence | "Is a lamp brought in to be put under the bushel basket, or under the bed, and not | "...he sternly ordered them (unclean spirits) not to make him known." (3:12) |

| Theme | Softer Jesus | Harder Jesus |
|--|--|--|
| | on the lampstand? For there is nothing hidden, except to be disclosed; nor is anything secret, except to come to light.” (4:21-22) | “To you (disciples) has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables; in order that they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand, so that they may not turn again and be forgiven.” (4:11-12) |
| Assurance vs. Abandonment | <p>“Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?” (4:40)</p> <p>“Daughter, your faith has made you well....” (5:34)</p> <p>“Do not fear, only believe.” (5:36)</p> <p>“All things can be done for the one who believes.” (9:23)</p> <p>“...whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.” (11:24)</p> | <p>“As for yourselves, beware; for they will hand you over to councils; and you will be beaten in synagogues....” (13:9)</p> <p>“And if anyone says to you at that time, ‘Look! Here is the Messiah!’ Or ‘Look, there he is!’ do not believe it. False messiahs and false prophets will appear....” (13:21-22)</p> <p>“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (15:34)</p> <p>“So they (Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome) went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement and seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.” (16:8) <i>Note:</i> These are not words of Christ, but are the last words contained in the earliest known manuscripts of Mark.</p> |
| Bad vs. Good Theft | <p>“For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, <i>theft</i>, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly.” (7:21-22)</p> <p>“My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations, but you have made it a den of <i>robbers</i>.” (11:17)</p> | <p>“Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden: <i>untie it and bring it.</i>” (11:2)</p> <p>“Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit?” (14:48) <i>Note:</i> At this point, the disciples desert Jesus and flee.</p> |
| Aversion vs. Acceptance of Gentiles | “Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.” (7:27) | “For saying that, you may go— the demon has left your daughter.” (7:29) |
| Sign vs. No Proof of Heaven | “I am; and ‘you (the high priest) will see the Son of Man seated and the right hand of the Power,’ and ‘coming with the clouds of heaven.’” (14:62) | “Why does this generation ask for a sign (of heaven)? Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to this generation.” (8:12) |
| Inclusion vs. Exclusion | “Truly I tell you (disciples), there are some standing here who will not taste | “You faithless generation, how much longer must I be among you (disciples)? |

| Theme | Softer Jesus | Harder Jesus |
|--|--|--|
| | death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power.” (9:1) | How much longer must I put up with you?” (9:19) |
| Who’s on First? | “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.” (9:35) “But many who are first will be last , and the last will be first.” (10:31) | “For to those who have, more will be given; and from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away.” (4:25) |
| Unity vs. Discord | “...be at peace with one another.” (9:50) | “Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death.” (13:12) |
| Honoring vs. Disregarding Family | “Honor your father and mother” (10:19) | “Who are my mother and my brothers?” (3:33-35) “Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with e persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life.” (10:29-30) |
| Mitigating vs. Exacerbating Poverty | “...go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven....” (10:21) “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” (10:25) “Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury...she out of poverty has put in everything she had....” (12:43-44) | “For to those who have, more will be given; and from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away.” (4:25) “For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me.” (14:7) |
| Second Thoughts vs. No Remorse | “Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want.” (14:36) | “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him... and kill him; and after three days he will rise again.” (10:33-34) |

Both Matthew and Luke provide relatively comparable accounts for most of the messages of conflict noted for Mark. Two exceptions are noted. Neither Matthew nor Luke offers the disciples the Markan hope that “some standing here will not taste death until they see

that the kingdom of God has come with power.²⁸⁰ And neither of the other two synoptics include the request that the disciples “be at peace with one another.”²⁸¹

Some aspects of the conflicts cited for Mark receive significantly different treatment by Matthew and Luke. One of the more interesting ones relates to Jesus pledge at the last supper not to drink again. Mark cites Jesus as saying: “...I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”²⁸² Left unclear is whether the new kingdom is present or future oriented, although other uses of the term in Mark could argue for a present (or relatively immanent) experience.

Matthew keeps company with Mark for the first part of Jesus statement, but both personalizes and futurizes the latter part by concluding “...when I drink it new *with you* in *my father’s kingdom*.”²⁸³ Luke’s statement is altered also in the direction of the future, with Jesus indicating: “...I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the *kingdom of God comes*.”²⁸⁴

Mark’s statement that “the Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath...” is altered by both of the other synoptics to read: “...the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.”²⁸⁵

There also are differences in the way that the early Sunday visit to Jesus’ tomb is handled. None of the three synoptics seem to agree on specifically which women made the visit.²⁸⁶ Of equal or perhaps greater interest, the three synoptics describe the reactions of these early morning visitors quite differently. The early versions of Mark (ending at verse 8 of chapter 16) clearly have the women fleeing from the tomb in “terror and amazement.” Matthew describes a somewhat more complex emotion of “fear and great joy”. Luke simply describes the women “returning” from the tomb to relay the information to the disciples and others, with no other specific emotion noted.

More than the other synoptics, Luke exhibits a tendency to play down (or soften) situations involving conflict. For example, in response to the question of the Sadducees regarding marriage in heaven, Mark has Jesus saying: “He is God not of the dead, but of the living.”²⁸⁷ Luke’s Jesus makes the same pronouncement, then adds: “for to him all of them are alive.”²⁸⁸ In this way Luke implies not only the continued life of Old Testament

²⁸⁰ Mark 9:1.

²⁸¹ Mark 9:50.

²⁸² Mark 14:25.

²⁸³ Matthew 26:29, key changes noted in *italics*.

²⁸⁴ Luke 22:18.

²⁸⁵ Matthew 12:8, Luke 6:5.

²⁸⁶ Mark has Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome visiting the tomb; for Luke the For Luke it is Joanna and the other women as well as Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James. For Matthew, the visitors are solely Mary Magdalene and the “other Mary” (not specified).

²⁸⁷ Mark 12:27.

²⁸⁸ Luke 20:38.

patriarchs, but also the ongoing existence of the eight brothers who were husbands to the widow in question.

Mark has Jesus saying that he talks in parables in part so that those “outside” “may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand, *so that they may not turn again and be forgiven.*”²⁸⁹ Luke deletes this more hardened (*italicized*) portion of the statement.

Mark’s Jesus also is blunt with the disciples in the storm tossed boat: “Have you still no faith?”²⁹⁰ Matthew softens this somewhat to “you of little faith.”²⁹¹ Luke goes further to simply ask: “Where is your faith?”²⁹²

In responding to the question of the high priest as to whether this is the Messiah, Mark’s Jesus answers “I am”. Matthew has Jesus saying: “You have said so.” The Jesus of Mark and Matthew both then go on to make the statement that “you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of (the) Power and coming on (with) the clouds of heaven.”²⁹³

In contrast, Luke’s Jesus fails to definitively say that he is the Messiah, instead saying: “If I tell you, you will not believe.”²⁹⁴ Luke goes on to depict the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the power of God but deletes the introductory observation that the high priest will see this and deletes reference to the future “coming with the clouds of heaven.”

Finally, it is noteworthy that both Matthew and Mark quote Jesus precisely the same in predicting his own death: “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him...”²⁹⁵ Luke replaces the handing over of Jesus from “chief priests and the scribes” to “the Gentiles”.²⁹⁶

As previously noted, Luke places special priority on assistance to the poor. Mark quotes Jesus as saying: “For you always have the poor with you, *and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish*, but you will always have me.” Matthew has Jesus making the same statement, only a bit more hard hitting by deleting the *italicized* phrase noted above. Luke avoids this saying altogether in his account of the anointing of Jesus.²⁹⁷

²⁸⁹ Mark 4:12.

²⁹⁰ Mark 4:40.

²⁹¹ Matthew 8:26.

²⁹² Luke 8:25.

²⁹³ From Matthew 26:64 and Mark 14:62 with items in (parentheses) indicating phrasing exclusive to Mark.

²⁹⁴ Luke 22:68.

²⁹⁵ Matthew 20:18, Mark 10:33.

²⁹⁶ Luke 18:32.

²⁹⁷ This involves a comparison of Mark 14:7 with Matthew 26:11 and Luke 7.

While a reading of Mark provides perhaps the most distinctive differences between a *soft* and a *hard* Jesus, Matthew and Luke also provide some passages unique to their respective gospels. Matthew is notable for contrasting God's emphasis on love and care versus uncertainty and strife.

Matthew & Conflicting Statements of Jesus

| Theme | Softer Jesus | Harder Jesus |
|---------------------------|--|---|
| Carefree vs. Worry | And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin...But if god so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you – you of little faith? Therefore, do not worry....” (6:28-31) | “Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day you Lord is coming...Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.” (24:42-44) “Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.” (25:13) |
| Love vs. Strife | “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (19:19, 22:39) | “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.” (11:34) “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which on the outside look beautiful, but inside they are full of the bones of the dead and of all kinds of filth.” (23:27) |

Luke presents conflict in more practical terms -- including examples associated with lending or saving and following Jesus.

Luke & Conflicting Statements of Jesus

| Theme | Softer Jesus | Harder Jesus |
|--------------------------------|--|---|
| Giving vs. Lending | “If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return.” (6:34-35) | In a parable: “Why then did you not put my money into the bank? Then when I returned, I could have collected it with interest.” (19:23) |
| Inclusion vs. Exclusion | “...whoever is not against you is for you.” (9:50) | “Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.” (14:27) |

For all three synoptics, the ambivalence of the Jesus message tends to focus more on the present material world. The Gospel of John also provides evidence of tension between a soft versus hard Jesus.

John actually offers more examples of conflicting statements from Jesus than does Mark's gospel. However, John's emphasis is more on the future and the spiritual (while Mark focused more on the present and the material).

John & Conflicting Statements of Jesus

| Theme | Softer Jesus | Harder Jesus |
|---|---|--|
| Welcome vs. Exclusion from Heaven | To Nathaniel: "...you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." (1:51) To disciples: "In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also." (14:2-3) | To disciples: "Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'where I am going, you cannot come.'" (13:33) |
| Reverence vs. Disregard for God's House | To sellers: "Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" (2:16) | To Samaritan woman: "...the hour is coming when you worship the Father neither on this mountain (Gerizim) nor in Jerusalem." (4:21) |
| Salvation via Belief in the Son vs. Works | "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life." (3:16) | "If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me. But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father." (10:37-38) |
| Avoiding vs. Pursuing Damnation | "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." (3:17) "I do not judge anyone who hears my words and does not keep them, for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world." (12:47) | "I told you that you would die in your sins, for you will die in your sins unless you believe that I am he." (8:24) "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind." (8:39) To Peter: "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." (13:8) |
| Mission of God's Will vs. Truth | "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work." (4:34) | "For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth." (18:37) |
| Healing for Glory vs. Prospective Second Catastrophe | Regarding Lazarus: "This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." (11:4) Regarding blind man: "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him." (9:3) | To healed man later found at temple: "See, you have been made well! Do not sin any more, so that nothing worse happens to you." (5:14) |
| Open vs. Qualified Acceptance | "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." (6:35) | "...you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves." (6:26) |
| Open vs. Qualified | "Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to | "...no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father." (6:65) |

| Theme | Softer Jesus | Harder Jesus |
|---|--|---|
| Acceptance | me I will never drive away....” (6:37) “”The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they might have life, and have it abundantly.” (10:10) | “...anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit.” (10:1) ²⁹⁸ |
| Salvation for Some vs. All | And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. (6:39) | “...the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and will come out—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.” (5:28-29) |
| Free Will vs. Predes- tination | “Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life.” (6:47) | “You did not choose me, but I chose you.” (15:16) “Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.” (4:8) |
| Choosing Good vs. Bad | “Did I not choose you, the twelve?” (6:70) | “Yet one of you is a devil.” (6:70) |
| Openness vs. Secrecy | Brothers to Jesus: “...no one who wants to be widely known acts in secret. If you do these things, show yourself to the world.” (7:4) Jesus to high priest: “I have spoken openly to the world. I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret.” (18:20) | Jesus: “Go to the festival yourselves. I am not going to this festival, for my time has not yet fully come.” (7:8) <i>Note:</i> Jesus then secretly goes to the festival in Jerusalem. (v. 10) |
| Knowing vs. Not Knowing God | “Anyone who resolves to do the will of God will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own.” (7:17) | “You know me, and you know where I am from. I have not come on my own. But the one who sent me is true, and you do not know him.” (7:28) |
| Life vs. Death | “...whoever keeps my word will never see death.” (8:51) “...everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.” (11:26) | “...an hour is coming when those who kill you will think that by doing so they are offering worship to God.” (16:2) Lazarus is dead; Jesus weeps (11:35) To Peter: “But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.” Jesus said this to indicate “the kind of death by which he (Peter) would glorify God.” (21:18-19) |
| Earthly Abundance vs. Meagerness | “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” (10:10) “...I tell you, if you ask anything of the | “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him.” (9:3) |

²⁹⁸ In verse 7 of chapter 10, Jesus says, “I am the gate.”

| Theme | Softer Jesus | Harder Jesus |
|--|---|---|
| | Father in my name, he will give it to you.” (16:23) | <p>“I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.” (9:39)</p> <p>“Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.” (12:25)</p> <p>“In the world you face persecution.” (16:33)</p> |
| Security vs. Vulnerability of the Flock (Believers) | <p>“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” (10:11)</p> <p>“I know my own and my own know me.” (10:14)</p> | The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. (10:12) |
| Security vs. Duty | “Father, save me from this hour?” (12:27) | “No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour.” (12:27) |
| Friendship vs. Servitude | “I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.” (15:15) | “...servants are not greater than their master.” (13:16, 15:20) |
| Finding vs. Losing Heaven | To disciples: “You know the way to the place where I am going.” (14:4) | To Pharisees: “You will search for me, but you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come.” (7:34) |
| Knowing vs. Not Knowing God | To disciples: “If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.” (14:7) | <p>To Pharisees: “You know neither me nor my father.” (8:19)</p> <p>To disciples: “But they will do all these things to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.” (15:21)</p> |
| Finding vs. Losing Jesus | “...and again a little while, and you will see me.” (16:16) | “A little while, and you will no longer see me...(16:16) <i>Note:</i> The disciples ask, “What does he mean...?” (v. 17) |
| Evasion vs. Directness | “The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures, but will tell you plainly of the Father.” (16:25) | “I have said these things to you in figures of speech.” (16:25) |

In contrast with the synoptics, there is a clear sense that John’s Jesus often utters contradictory statements purposefully and in rapid succession. For John, this appears to be a crucial part of Jesus teaching method. The crowds, the leaders, the disciples all get confused, but hey, that’s part of the game.

James & Paul: In the dialogue of faith versus works, James presents the opposing view. His short epistle unequivocally presents the position that “faith without works is dead.”²⁹⁹ At the conclusion of his letter, even James momentarily appears to back off just a bit. He comments that the “prayer of faith will save the sick.” Then James provides an important works oriented caveat: “The prayer of the *righteous* is powerful and effective.” In the final analysis, the prayer of faith is powerful, but this prayer is built on a righteousness of works.

Of all the accounts of Jesus and his teachings, those of Paul might be thought of as the most straightforward, with the least potential for internal conflict. Certainly, Paul’s lack of interest in recounting specific activities of Jesus life renders his books more immune from evaluation – at least with regard to potential conflicts between quoted sayings of Jesus.

However, even Paul is not able to avoid presenting sometimes conflicted views of Jesus’ teaching. For example, Paul’s viewpoint on the primacy of faith over works is articulated most forcefully in his letter to the Galatians. He states that “we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ.”³⁰⁰

Paul rails most particularly at the practice of circumcision as rendering Christ to be of “no benefit.” Yet even Paul can not totally endorse a position of uninhibited faith and freedom. He is compelled to warn: “for you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become *slaves* to one another.”³⁰¹

A second, more personal (or internalized) form of conflict also is raised various writings of Paul including Galatians. He writes: “For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want.” Paul goes on to warn that those who indulge in the desires of the flesh “will not inherit the kingdom of God.”³⁰²

Has Paul unnecessarily created a conflict between flesh and spirit? Or is this theology a reflection of the very words and actions of Jesus? One could claim that Paul is creating theology that steps well beyond what is portrayed by the gospels – certainly beyond the synoptics.

Contrasting Paul with Luke: On the other hand, Paul may simply be exploiting a conflict hinted at from Jesus’ own life. Go back for a moment to the comment in Luke’s gospel about Jesus’ drinking activities:

²⁹⁹ James 2:26.

³⁰⁰ Galatians 2:16.

³⁰¹ Galatians 5:2,13.

³⁰² Galatians 5:17,21.

For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, 'He has a demon'; the Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'³⁰³

Luke alludes to a clear conflict in perception between John the Baptist and Jesus – a stumblingblock to the Pharisees and lawyers trying to get a fix on who Jesus was. But never fear, as Jesus approaches the end of his ministry, he does an about face. In the waning hours of his life, he becomes a teetotaler. Luke describes the drinking portion of the event known as the Last Supper this way:

Then he (Jesus) took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on *I will not drink of the fruit of the vine* until the kingdom of God comes."³⁰⁴

Was Luke's Jesus simply reflecting on the fact that he would be having no more meals prior to his crucifixion? Or is something else going on? Could this be an example of Paul's struggle between flesh and spirit? And for Jesus, this time the will of the Spirit won out.

Whatever the case, the imagery of the cup and the wine continues. A few moments later after saying no more drink, Jesus actually distributed the cup to his disciples. "And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.'"³⁰⁵

Jesus also tells his disciples: "You are those who have stood by me in my trials; and I confer on you, just as my Father has conferred on me, a kingdom, so that you may eat and *drink at my table* in my kingdom...."³⁰⁶

Later that evening at Gethsemane, Jesus prays: "Father, if you are willing, remove *this cup* from me; yet, not my will but yours be done."³⁰⁷ The next day, as Jesus is crucified, the soldiers mockingly offer him sour wine. Luke does not say whether Jesus accepted.³⁰⁸

Now, we travel one last time to Paul. His description of the Last Supper marks the only time that Paul quotes Jesus during his earthly ministry. His description of the wine and the cup is briefer than that of Luke's gospel. Paul simply quotes Jesus as saying: "This

³⁰³ Luke 7:33-34.

³⁰⁴ Luke 22:17-18.

³⁰⁵ Luke 22:20.

³⁰⁶ Luke 22:28-29.

³⁰⁷ Luke 22:42.

³⁰⁸ Luke 23:36. Mark 15:23 indicates that Jesus was offered wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. Matthew 27:34 notes that Jesus tasted the wine (mixed with gall as a poisonous herb) but then did not drink it. John 19:30 states that Jesus "received the wine" (a sour wine) then declared "It is finished.," and then "bowed his head and gave up the spirit."

cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”³⁰⁹

For both Luke and Paul, eating the bread and drinking the wine symbolized both a new covenant and remembrance. The new covenant is an event of the spirit; remembrance is of Jesus as flesh and blood.

Flesh and spirit. And so we end this comparison, where we started with Paul’s words: “For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit.” A conflict certainly for Paul if not for Luke and Jesus himself.

Non-Canonical Gospels: Within the New Testament gospels, we find a Jesus in seeming conflict with himself. Paul describes a personal conflict – that seems to also symbolize Jesus’ own dilemma. What about other writings of the early church period?

As we turn to accounts outside the generally accepted New Testament, some present relatively cohesive pictures. Others present more discordant elements. This is particularly true of the Gospel of Thomas.

What follows are selected sayings from the Gospel of Thomas organized around themes of what at least appear to be conflicting values.

Thomas & Conflicting Statements of Jesus

| Theme | One Point of View | An Alternative |
|---|--|---|
| Commensality vs. Conflict | “When you go into any region and walk about in the countryside, when people take you in, eat what they serve you and heal the sick among them.” (14:4) | “Perhaps people think that I have come to cast peace upon the world. They do not know that I have come to cast conflicts upon the earth: fire, sword, war. For there’ll be three against two and two against three, father against son and son against father, and they will stand alone.” (16:1-3) “Whoever does not hate father and mother cannot be my disciple, and whoever does not hate brothers and sisters, and carry the cross as I do, will not be worthy of me.” (55:1-2) |
| Short vs. Long-Term Orientation (or is it don’t worry vs. complain)? | “Don’t fret, from morning to evening and from evening to morning, about what you’re going to wear.” (36) | “So also with you, seek his treasure that is unfailing, that is enduring, where no moth comes to eat and no worm destroys.” (76:3) “[Foxes have] their dens and birds have their nests, but human beings have no place to lie down and rest.” (86) |
| Rewards for | “Congratulations to the poor, for to you | “If you have money, don’t lend it at |

³⁰⁹ I Corinthians 11:25.

| Theme | One Point of View | An Alternative |
|---|---|---|
| Poverty vs. Wealthy Philanthropy | belongs Heaven's domain." (54) | interest. Rather give [it] to someone from whom you won't get it back." (95) |
| No Planning vs. Preparation | "Congratulations to those who go hungry, so the stomach of the one in want may be filled." (69:2) | "The Father's imperial rule is like [a] woman who took a little leaven, [hid] it in dough, and made it into large loaves of bread." (96:1-2) |
| Hidden vs. Revealed Truth | "They said to him, 'Tell us who you are so that we may believe in you.' He said to them, 'You examine the face of heaven and earth, but you have not come to know the one who is in your presence, and you do not know how to examine the present moment.'" (91) | "Jesus [said], 'One who seeks will find, and for [one who knocks] it will be opened.'" (94) |
| Defense vs. Offense | "Congratulations to you when you are hated and persecuted." (68:1) | "Congratulations to those who know where the rebels are going to attack. [They] can get going, collect their imperial resources, and be prepared before the rebels arrive." (103) "...if the owners of a house know that a thief is coming, they will be on guard before the thief arrives and will not let the thief break into their house (their domain) and steal their possessions." (21:5) |
| Meager vs. Plentiful Harvest (Is the cup half empty or half full?) | "Grapes are not harvested from thorn trees, nor are figs gathered from thistles, for they yield no fruit. Good persons produce good from what they've stored up; bad persons produce evil from the wickedness they've stored up in their hearts, and say evil things. For from the overflow of the heart they produce evil." (45) | "The crop is huge but the workers are few, so beg the harvest boss to dispatch workers to the fields." (73) "There was a rich man who had a great deal of money. He said, 'I shall invest my money so that I may sow, reap, plant, and fill my storehouses with produce, that I may lack nothing.' These were the things he was thinking in his heart, but that very night he died.'" (63) |
| Following the Blind (or babes) vs. exercising discretion? | "If a blind person leads a blind person, both of them will fall into a hole." (34) | "The person old in days won't hesitate to ask a little child seven days old about the place of life, and that person will live." (4:1) |
| Jesus the Caretaker vs. Executioner | "The Kingdom is like a shepherd who had a hundred sheep. One of them, the largest, went astray. He left the ninety-nine and looked for the one until he found it. After he had toiled, he said to the sheep, 'I love you more than the ninety-nine.'" (107) | "Damn the Pharisees! They are like a dog sleeping in the cattle manger: the dog neither eats nor [lets] the cattle eat." (102) "Two will recline on a couch; one will die, one will live." (61:1) |
| Reverence for John the Baptist or Jesus (Christ?), or Both? | "From Adam to John the Baptist, among those born of women, no one is so much greater than John the Baptist that his eyes should not be averted." (46:1) | "...a slave cannot serve two masters, otherwise that slave will honor the one and offend the other." (47:2) |

| Theme | One Point of View | An Alternative |
|--|---|--|
| The Rich Embrace Others vs. Stay Away | "A person was receiving guests. When he had prepared the dinner, he sent his slave to invite the guests. The slave went to the first and said to that one, "My master invites you." That one said, "Some merchants owe me money; they are coming to me tonight. I have to go and give them instructions. Please excuse me from dinner." The slave went to another and said to that one, "My master has invited you." That one said to the slave, "I have bought a house, and I have been called away for a day. I shall have no time." The slave went to another and said to that one, "My master invites you." That one said to the slave, "My friend is to be married, and I am to arrange the banquet. I shall not be able to come. Please excuse me from dinner." The slave went to another and said to that one, "My master invites you." That one said to the slave, "I have bought an estate, and I am going to collect the rent. I shall not be able to come. Please excuse me." The slave returned and said to his master, "Those whom you invited to dinner have asked to be excused." The master said to his slave, "Go out on the streets and bring back whomever you find to have dinner." (64:1-11) | "Why have you come out to the countryside? To see a reed shaken by the wind? And to see a person dressed in soft clothes, [like your] rulers and your powerful ones? They are dressed in soft clothes, and they cannot understand truth." (78) |
| Who's Fit to Judge? | "The Pharisees and the scholars have taken the keys of knowledge and have hidden them. They have not entered nor have they allowed those who want to enter to do so." (39:1-2) | "You see the sliver in your friend's eye, but you don't see the timber in your own eye. When you take the timber out of your own eye, then you will see well enough to remove the sliver from your friend's eye." (26) |
| Take What You See (or Hear) at Face Value vs. Don't | "Why do you wash the outside of the cup? Don't you understand that the one who made the inside is also the one who made the outside?" (89) | "What you will hear in your ear, in the other ear proclaim from your rooftops." (33:1) |

Many of these sayings will look familiar, even to those not acquainted with the Gospel of Thomas. This is because many of the sayings attributed to Jesus by Thomas are also found in one or more of the canonical gospels – often in very similar form.

One of the more stark differences in practical theology revolves around the issue of what to do when persecuted. One view espoused by Jesus – both in Thomas and the New

Testament – is to turn the other cheek. In the words of Thomas: "Congratulations to you when you are hated and persecuted."³¹⁰

The opposing view is not found directly in the New Testament but it is found in Thomas:

"Congratulations to those who know where the rebels are going to attack. [They] can get going, collect their imperial resources, and be prepared before the rebels arrive."³¹¹

So, with Thomas, does one roll over and submit to the enemy. Or does one get prepared for the counterattack? Jesus says both. This type of seeming conflict is repeated with regularity throughout the sayings of Thomas.

Some (though not all) of the other non-canonical gospels also are imbued with their own unique built-in contradictions. For example, the Secret Book of James provides a contrast between the values of preserving one's health and life versus no care for the future. At one point, the author quotes Jesus as saying: "Congratulations to those who have not been sick, and have experienced relief before they become sick. God's domain belongs to you."³¹² Yet, two chapters later, Jesus evidences a seemingly different concern: "...none will be saved unless they believe who are afraid of death; for <God's> domain belongs to those who are dead."³¹³

If Secret James is confusing because of apparent contradictions in Jesus teachings, the Infancy Gospel of Thomas is striking for wildly contrasting actions of the young Savior. In his early youth, the author claims that Jesus withers the hand of a boy who drains a pond Jesus made; another boy is struck dead for bumping into Jesus.³¹⁴ Later, after scolding by his father, Jesus evidences a change toward actions of healing. He resurrects a child who fell from a roof, heals a young man's foot, heals snake bit of brother James, and restores life to construction worker.³¹⁵

It is not surprising that Jesus apparent ambiguity would create confusion among his followers. The writer of the Secret Book of James expresses the frustration of at least one disciple, in this case that of Peter: "Sometimes you urge us on toward heaven's domain, yet at other times you turn us away, Lord. Sometimes you make appeals, draw us toward faith, and promise us life, yet at other times you drive us away from heaven's domain."

The reply of Jesus helps little, faulting the disciples' lack of understanding. What's more, the response appears directed toward the wrong person: "I have offered you faith many

³¹⁰ Thomas 68:1.

³¹¹ Thomas 103.

³¹² Secret Book of James 3:10.

³¹³ Secret James 5:5.

³¹⁴ Infancy Gospel of Thomas Chapters 3-4.

³¹⁵ Infancy Thomas Chapters 9-18.

times; moreover, I have made myself known to you, James, and you have not understood me.”³¹⁶

One other note. There may be hidden meaning that resolves what might be determined as superficial conflicts. The point is: at first glance, these statement pairs could be construed as conflicted – a source of creative tension.

Message Ambivalence Summarized: What is the point of all this message ambivalence? Did Jesus know he was talking out of both sides of his mouth – that he couldn’t keep a straight story? Did he care?

But, maybe there’s a different perspective. What if all these efforts to "make sense of it all" are missing the real message? A message with three parts:

1. While each of the early authors (canon and other) may have placed their own particular spin with their respective accounts, the conflicts reported reflect something deeper: contradictory statements and actions of the historical Jesus.
2. Jesus intentionally set up situations of conflict and contradiction.
3. We can never fully experience the kingdom without living through the contradictions -- both individually and collectively.

This alternative message represents a perspective worth considering – despite the discomfort with which the western mind approaches a non-rational argument. Yet the evidence from both canonical and non-canonical works clearly suggests that Jesus did not approach the kingdom of God logically. Rather, he used – even enjoyed – the dialectic interaction of continuously juxtaposing conflicting values and ideas.

17. Messiah

An important theme of Christianity is that Jesus is the Christ or Messiah. How often is this term actually used in the New Testament? And in what contexts is it used?

The term Messiah is used in the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible only four times, twice each in the books of Daniel and John, respectively.³¹⁷ Subsequent translations reinterpret the Daniel term as the “anointed one” rather than Messiah.³¹⁸

Gospel Accounts: John’s gospel is the only one of the KJV to directly apply the term Messiah (or Messias) to Jesus. At the beginning of Jesus ministry, Andrew goes to tell his brother Simon (Peter): “We have found the Messias”³¹⁹

³¹⁶ Secret James 9:1-2.

³¹⁷ Daniel 9:25 and 9:26 feature the restoration of Jerusalem, followed by the coming off of the Messiah or anointed one.

³¹⁸ For example, both the NRSV and NIV substitute “anointed one” for Messiah.

Later, the Samaritan woman meeting Jesus at Jacob's well states: "I know that the Messiah cometh...." Jesus responds: "I that speak unto thee am he."³²⁰

Elsewhere, the KJV Version of the New Testament contains no references to Jesus directly as Messiah, but more often applies the Greek term of Jesus as "Christ" (or Anointed). However, the two passages in John cited above provide a clear bridge between the Hebrew and Greek concepts of Messiah and Christ respectively – with the full text indicating that the Messiah is also called Christ.

Other more recent translations complicate the situation somewhat, by also applying the term Messiah more liberally to other New Testament passages. However, the bridge between Messiah and Christ is maintained even in translations such as the NRSV. For example, the statement of the Samaritan woman is now translated as: " 'I know that Messiah is coming' (who is called Christ)."³²¹

Using the NRSV, John as well as the other three synoptics each contains numerous references to Jesus as Christ and Messiah. However, all three synoptics suggest that Jesus personally was wary of this term being applied by the general public.

Peter makes his famous confession of Jesus as "the Messiah, the Son of the living God."³²² But, then Jesus "sternly ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah."³²³

In Mark's gospel, Jesus never describes himself as either the Messiah or Christ. The term is applied by others or by Jesus in oblique references to himself. Jesus' oblique references include:

Telling the disciple John: "For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward."
(9:41)

To a larger audience, Jesus asks: "How can the scribes say that the Messiah is the Son of David?" (12:25)

To all the disciples: "And if anyone says to you ..., 'Look! Here is the Messiah!' or 'Look! There he is!' – do not believe it." (13:21)

³¹⁹ John 1:41, KJV.

³²⁰ John 4:25-26, KJV.

³²¹ John 4:25, NRSV.

³²² The NRSV, *Harper Collins Study Bible*, provides an annotation that this can be interpreted as Messiah or the Christ.

³²³ Matthew 16:16-16:20. Parallel passages are found in Mark 8:29-30 and Luke 9:20-21.

And on two occasions others call Jesus the Messiah, albeit with questioning or taunting motives. Before the Council, the high priest asks Jesus: “Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?” For once, Mark records a direct answer: “I am...”³²⁴

And after his crucifixion, Mark records the chief priests and scribes mocking Jesus: “Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe.”³²⁵

The other two synoptic writers Matthew and Luke share Mark’s reticence at having Jesus proclaim himself directly as Christ. Jesus acknowledges his claim as the Messiah only at the end of his ministry, before the high priest.³²⁶

Such inhibitions are also evident in the Gospel of John. However, early in John’s account of his ministry, Jesus acknowledges to the Samaritan woman that he is the Messiah.³²⁷

To a crowd in Jerusalem questioning whether he is the Messiah, Jesus stirs the pot: “You know me, and you know where I am from. I have not come on my own. But the one who sent me is true, and you do not know him. I know him, because I am from Him, and he sent me.”³²⁸ John then records that there was then a (failed) effort to arrest Jesus.

The intensity of public interest in ascertaining whether or not Jesus is the Messiah continues to build. At another festival, Jesus is again confronted with the question: “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.”

Jesus responds obliquely, then gets more direct: “I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name testify to me; but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. Not one will snatch them out of my hand. What my father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father’s hand. The Father and I are one.”

That the listeners got the point is evident by their next action. The immediate reaction was the taking up of stones to stone Jesus.³²⁹

Shortly thereafter, Lazarus dies. At his grave, Jesus asks sister Martha: “Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me

³²⁴ Mark 14:61-62.

³²⁵ Mark 15:32.

³²⁶ Acknowledgments of Jesus as Christ or Messiah in response to the questions of the high priest or council are found most directly at Mark 14:62, and somewhat more obliquely in Matthew 26:64 and Luke 22:67-70. In Mark’s gospel, Jesus’ response to the high priest’s question is “I am”. In Matthew, it is “You have said so.” In Luke, the response is: “If I tell you, you will not believe...”

³²⁷ John 4:26.

³²⁸ John 7:28-29.

³²⁹ John 10:24-31.

will never die. Do you believe this?” Martha’s response: “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.”³³⁰

And one more time, a crowd puts Jesus to the test: “We have heard from the law that the Messiah remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?”

Once last time, Jesus gives his audience a less than direct response – rather a metaphor on which to reflect: “The light is with you for a little longer. Walk While you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.”³³¹

In the final analysis, John is less willing than the three synoptics to leave his readers guessing as to whether Jesus really is the Messiah. In concluding his narrative, John writes: “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus *is the Messiah*, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.”³³²

In Luke, the angelic host introduces Jesus at his birth as “a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.”³³³ In John, the Samaritan villagers say to the woman who had been conversing with Jesus that “...we know that this is truly the Savior of the world.”³³⁴

James & Paul: James is relatively circumspect in his views, but even James expresses support for Jesus as Messiah. The letter opens: “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.”³³⁵ Later, James asks: “My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our Lord Jesus Christ?”³³⁶

Far more than the gospel writers or James, the apostle Paul is unequivocal in placing Jesus as Christ at the center of his message – over and over again. Consider, the following introductory statements from pertinent epistles of Paul:

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we

³³⁰ John 11:25-27.

³³¹ John 12:35-36.

³³² John 20:30-31.

³³³ Luke 2:11.

³³⁴ John 4:42.

³³⁵ James 1:1.

³³⁶ James 2:1.

have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name, including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.” (Romans 1:1-6)

“Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God...” (I Corinthians 1:1)

“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus...” (II Corinthians 1:1)

“Paul an apostle – sent neither by human commission nor from human authorities, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead....” (Galatians 1:1)

“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God....” (Ephesians 1:1)

“Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus....” (Philippians 1:1)

“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother (Colossians 1:1)

In short, for Paul Jesus is the Christ – the anointed one of God.

Non-Canonical Gospels: The non-canonical gospels offer a couple of interesting twists. There is virtually no use of the term Messiah and there are very few designations of Jesus as Christ. However, a number of the non-canonical writings place considerable emphasis on Jesus as “Savior.”

The Gospel of Thomas contains virtually no use of any of these terms. However, Jesus is referred to as “Christ” in the Infancy Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of the Hebrews, Gospel of the Ebionites, and Gospel of the Nazoreans.

The appellation of Jesus as “Savior” receives even more widespread use – in the non-canonical writings including the Secret Book of James, Dialogue of the Savior, Gospel of Mary, Gospel of the Hebrews, and the fragmentary Gospel Oxyrhynchus 840. By comparison, New Testament gospels depict Jesus as Savior on only two occasions, once each in Luke and John.

Messiah Summarized: There is little consistency across the New Testament and the non-canonical early literature as to Jesus identity with God. The Gospel of John and Paul’s epistles clearly portray Jesus as Christ – the anointed one of God. Matthew, Luke and James appear more ambivalent. Mark and Thomas appear least comfortable with terms such as Messiah and Christ. Other non-canonical gospels are mixed in their reviews – but with more common use of the term “Savior” than either Messiah or Christ.

If there was no unanimity about Jesus role as Messiah among even the writers of the New Testament canon, how much more should we expect now? The argument can be made that options available two millennia back should remain on the table for discussion today.

18. Prophecy Historicized

Some but not all writers of both canonical and non-canonical gospels feel it is important to set the accounts of Jesus life in a prophetic context. Two types of historical approaches are noted:

- (a) Drawing on prior statements to demonstrate that Jesus is the *fulfillment* of prophecy. This is termed *prophecy historicized* and is the subject of this section of this review.
- (b) Statements of *future* historic import made directly by Jesus during his sojourn on earth. This is termed *prophecy projected* and is the subject of the next section.

Gospel Accounts: The importance of linking Jesus to historical roots is immediately apparent in Matthew as Jesus genealogy is presented. Luke also presents a genealogy.

Both Matthew and Luke present the lineage of Joseph, even though these also are the two gospels to assert the virgin birth. Consequently, both synoptics writers feel some need to clarify or justify their genealogical approach:

Matthew describes the relationship as “...Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah.” (1:16)

Luke puts it this way: “Jesus was about thirty years old when he began his work. He was the son (as was thought) of Joseph son of...” (3:23)

However, the genealogies of Matthew and Luke do not match up at all. They differ in two key respects.

First, Matthew’s genealogy runs from Abraham forward, while Luke starts with Jesus and works back. This makes a direct comparison of the two genealogies somewhat awkward.

Second, the lineages presented by these two synoptic writers do not list the same ancestors, though both end up showing a connection back to King David, but via different routes. This inconsistency becomes immediately apparent when the genealogies are ordered to track *back* the first few generations from Joseph.

Comparative Genealogies of Matthew & Luke (from Joseph back)

Matthew
Joseph
|
Jacob
|
Matthan
|
Eleazar

Luke
Joseph
|
Heli
|
Matthat
|
Levi

The lineage becomes similarly muddled when tracing the genealogy *forward* from King David.

Comparative Genealogies of Matthew & Luke (from David forward)

| Matthew | Luke |
|----------|----------|
| David | David |
| | |
| Solomon | Nathan |
| | |
| Rheoboam | Mattatha |
| | |
| Abijah | Menna |

One other difference between the two genealogies is noted. Matthew tracks the lineage starting at Abraham, while Luke takes it back to Adam. Matthew feels it important to note the symmetry of generational groupings, as there are 14 generations each between: (a) Abraham to David; (b) David to the deportation of Judah to Babylon; and (c) deportation to the Messiah.³³⁷ Matthew makes it from David to Jesus in 28 generations; Luke's lineage requires 43 generations.

Each of the four New Testament gospel writers appears interested in Jesus' ministry as a fulfillment of prophecy. However, the prophecy that is historicized varies considerably between the authors.

Matthew makes the greatest use of prophecy, with 14 quotations introduced with similar formulas. The typical *formula* involves an introduction like: "all this took place to fulfill..." Isaiah is the prophet most widely cited, although there are also references to Samuel, Psalms, Jeremiah, Hosea, Micah and Zechariah.

Another 14 scriptures linked to realization of Old Testament prophecy are also introduced by Matthew. These all involve direct statements by Jesus; some are literally quoted while others represent paraphrases or loose interpretations of Old Testament scriptures. Here, too, a wide variety of Old Testament sources are cited, notably Deuteronomy, Psalms, Jeremiah, Daniel, Micah, Zechariah and Malachi.

Matthew's Prophecies Historicized

| Topic | Prophecy Historicized |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Formulaic Fulfillments: | |
| Virgin Birth | "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel." (1:23, from Isaiah 7:14) |
| Bethlehem's Prominence | "And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people |

³³⁷One reason for Matthew's symmetry is that the number fourteen apparently is the numerical value of David's name in Hebrew. Matthew's genealogy omits four kings and a queen after David.

| Topic | Prophecy Historicized |
|--|--|
| | Israel.” (2:6, from Micah 5:2 and 2 Samuel 5:2) |
| Return from Egypt | “Out of Egypt I have called my son.” (2:15, from Hosea 11:1) |
| Herod’s Massacre of the Infants | “A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.” (2:18, from Jeremiah 31:15) |
| Nazareth Home | “He will be called a Nazorean.” (2:23, with no direct Old Testament source) |
| John the Baptist’s Role as Forerunner | “The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’ “ (3:3, from Isaiah 40:3) |
| Capernaum as the Base for Jesus Ministry (in the land of Zebulun & Naphtali) | “Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles -- the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.” (4:15-16, from Isaiah 9:1-2) |
| Jesus as Healer | “He took our infirmities and bore our diseases.” (8:17, from Isaiah 53:4) |
| Jesus’ Desire to Remain Unknown | “Here is my servant, whom I have chosen, my beloved, with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. He will not wrangle or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets. He will not break a bruised reed or quench a smoldering wick until he brings justice to victory. And in his name the Gentiles will hope.” (12:18-21, from Isaiah 42:1-4) |
| Rationale for Use of Parables | “You will indeed listen, but never understand, and you will indeed look, but never perceive. For this people’s heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes; so that they might not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and understand with their heart and turn -- and I would heal them.” (13:14-15, from Isaiah 6:9-10) |
| Rationale for Use of Parables | “I will open my mouth to speak in parables; I will proclaim what has been hidden from the foundation of the world.” (13:35, from Psalms 78:2) |
| Entry into Jerusalem on a Donkey | “Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” (21:5, from Isaiah 62:11 and Zechariah 9:9) |
| Betrayal & Arrest of Jesus | “But all this has taken place, so that the scriptures of the prophets may be fulfilled.” (26:56, the only formulaic reference for which no specific text is introduced) |
| Betrayal for 30 Pieces of Silver | “And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of the one on whom a price had been set, on whom some of the people of Israel had set a price, and they gave them for the potter’s field, as the Lord commanded me.” (27:9-10, from Zechariah 11:13, loosely interpreted; note that Jeremiah is incorrectly identified in Matthew 27:9 as the source) |
| Other Statements of Jesus as Old Testament Fulfillments: | |
| Jesus’ First Response to the Devil (from the Temptation) | “One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” (4:4, from Deuteronomy 8:3) |
| The Devil’s Second Temptation (to Throw Himself Down) | “He will command his angels concerning you, and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’ “ (4:6, from Psalms 91:11-12) |
| Jesus’ Second Response | “Again it is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’ “ (4:7, from Deuteronomy 6:16) |
| Jesus’ Third Response | “Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.” (4:10, from Deuteronomy 6:13) |
| Family Divisions | “For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her |

| Topic | Prophecy Historicized |
|--|---|
| | mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and one's foes will be members of one's own household." (10:35-36, loosely taken from Micah 7:6) |
| Jesus on John the Baptist | "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you." (11:10, from Malachi 3:1) |
| Pharisees & Scribes | "This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines." (15:8-9, from Isaiah 29:13) |
| Crowds at Palm Sunday | "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" (21:9, with the line of blessing from Psalms 118:26) |
| Rationale for Overturning Tables of the Money Changers | "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer; but you are making it a den of robbers.' " (21:13, with parallels from Isaiah 56:7, Jeremiah 7:11 and Zechariah 14:21) |
| Children Shouting Hosannas to Jesus | "Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise for yourself?" (21:16, from Psalms 8:2, Septuagint) |
| Prediction of Death | "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes." (21:42, from Psalms 118:22-23) |
| Messiah's Relationship to King David | "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet.' " (22:44, from Psalms 110:1) |
| Desertion by Jesus' Disciples | "I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered." (26:31, from Zechariah 13:7) |
| Assertion as Messiah | "From now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven." (26:64, based on Daniel 7:13-14) |

Matthew's drive to demonstrate that Jesus' life is a fulfillment of prophecy leads this gospel writer to dangerous (and perhaps erroneous) applications of Old Testament scriptures. Matthew's first citation best illustrates the effects of this over-reaching, in this case brought about by a mis-translation of the Old Testament from the original Hebrew to the Greek Septuagint (in about the third century BC)

As indicated in the NRSV, Matthew quotes Isaiah 7:14 as: "Look, the *virgin* shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel."³³⁸ While this is a correct citation from the Septuagint, it misrepresents the original Hebrew. The Greek term used by Matthew and the Septuagint translation of Isaiah is *parthenos*, which means virgin. However, the original Hebrew word in Isaiah 7:14 is *almah*, which is more appropriately translated as maiden, young woman or unmarried woman.

A second question is whether Isaiah prophecy relates to the future Messiah or to a more immediate event -- or both. The *almah* may be a young woman betrothed to Isaiah and Immanuel (Emanuel) may be another name for Maher-Shal-al-Hash-Baz given birth by a prophetess as subsequently recorded in Isaiah 8:3.³³⁹

³³⁸ Matthew 1:23.

³³⁹ Speculation regarding the more immediate person designated as Emanuel is provided, for example, by *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan Bible Publishers (Grand Rapids, Michigan), 1988 printing.

Several other prophecies captured by Matthew are fraught with similar difficulties:

- The prophetic elevation of Bethlehem refers initially to this town's role as birthplace of King David. (2 Samuel 5:2)
- In the original statement that "Out of Egypt I have called my son", the term son is meant as the nation of Israel. (Hosea 11:1)³⁴⁰
- The weeping and loud lamentation heard in Ramah was originally heard at the exile of the Northern tribes of Israel to Assyria. (Jeremiah 31:15)
- The prophecy that "You will indeed listen, but never understand" appears to refer to the message that Isaiah was to take to his contemporaries. (Isaiah 6:8-9)
- As noted, the payment of thirty pieces of silver appears to be incorrectly attributed by Matthew to Jeremiah, although Jeremiah does purchase a field with payment in silver (Jeremiah 32:6-15). The more direct precedent appears to come from the prophet Zechariah who receives 30 shekels of silver in payment for wages and then places this amount in the treasury of the "house of the Lord" at the direction of the Lord. (Zechariah 11:12-14)

With many of the other prophetic passages (particularly from Isaiah), it is not possible to determine directly from the text whether the prophecy was originally intended to presage a near term event or the future coming of the Messiah. So Matthew apparently feels free to make the case for Messianic interpretation placed on the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

The other three gospel writers do not reach nearly as far as Matthew, but all three view Jesus as the fulfillment of more limited sets of Old Testament prophecies. Mark provides seven examples of Jewish scriptural prophecy fulfilled through Jesus. Of the 7 examples, 5 are also noted in Matthew.

Mark's Prophecies Historicized

| Topic | Prophecy Historicized |
|--|--|
| John the Baptist as Messenger | "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight....' " (1:2-3, adapted from Isaiah 40:3, Exodus 23:20 and Malachi 3:1) |
| Critique of Pharisees & Scribes | "This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines." (7:6-7, from Isaiah 29:13, Septuagint) |
| Triumphal Entry to Jerusalem | "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" (11:9-10, adapted from Psalms 118:26) |
| Cleansing of the Temple | "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations. But you have made it a den of robbers." (11:17, from Isaiah 56:7) |
| Rejection by Priests, Scribes & Elders | "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing and it is amazing in our eyes." (12:10-11, from Psalms 118:22-23) |

³⁴⁰ Hosea 11:1 reads: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son." This passage echoes similar thoughts expressed earlier in Exodus 4:22-23 and Deuteronomy 1:31.

| Topic | Prophecy Historicized |
|----------------------|---|
| David's Lineage | "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet.' " (12:36, from Psalms 110:1) |
| Assertion as Messiah | " 'You will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power,' and 'coming with the clouds of heaven.' " (14:62, adapted from Daniel 7:13-14) |

Mark exhibits a tendency to draw from multiple sources or loosely interpret Old Testament scripture. Five of the seven prophetic statements have been adapted substantially from their Old Testament sources.

Like Matthew, Mark has his own problems with accuracy in quotation. The second sentence of Mark's gospel proclaims: "As it is written in the gospel of Isaiah, ..." Yet the next words out of Mark's epistle appear to be from the prophet Malachi, not Isaiah.

Mark points this prophecy to John the Baptist and starts with "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you." The introductory statement closely parallels Malachi 3:1 and somewhat more loosely Exodus 23:20.³⁴¹ The last part of the quotation is most comparable to Isaiah's: "A voice cries out: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.'"³⁴²

Jesus' critique of Pharisees and Scribes quotes Isaiah 29:13, but the mid-phrase "in vain do they worship me" is a very loose paraphrase of Isaiah, and the ending phrase "teaching human precepts as doctrine" is not contained in Isaiah.

The only part of the Hosanna treatment with direct roots in the Psalms is the mid-phrase "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord."

In cleansing the Temple, Jesus draws from Isaiah 56:7 which states "for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples." The ending phrase that "you have made it a den of robbers" apparently is more the speaking of Jesus, because this phrase is not contained in Isaiah.

The quotations regarding the cornerstone and lineage from David square reasonably well with their sources in the Psalms, with the exception of relatively minor wording changes.

Finally, Jesus' reply to the high priest partially reflects Daniel 7:13 which states that "I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven."

Not surprisingly, Luke makes substantially greater use of prophecy realized than does Mark, but not as much as Matthew. While not directly serving as a prophecy, the Magnificat of Mary refers to fulfillment of prior prophecy. Mary concludes her hymn of praise by stating that: "He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,

³⁴¹ Malachi 3:1 states: "See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, ..." A similar text from Exodus 23:20 starts this way: "I am going to send an angel in front of you...."

³⁴² Isaiah 4:3.

according to the promise he made to our ancestor, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”³⁴³

Similarly, Luke provides an account of the father of John the Baptist (Zechariah) providing a prophecy that also reaches back to fulfillment of prior commitment:

... as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us. Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors, and has remembered his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.³⁴⁴

Of the 13 prophetic fulfillments noted by Luke, most are also found in the Gospel of Matthew.

Luke's Prophecies Historicized

| Topic | Prophecy Historicized |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| John as Messenger | “The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, the crooked shall be made straight and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’ “ (3:4-6, from Isaiah 40:3-5) |
| Jesus’ First Temptation by the Devil | “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’ “ (4:4 from Deuteronomy 8:3) |
| Response to Second Temptation | “It is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’ “ (4:8, from Deuteronomy 6:13) |
| Devil to Jesus (Third Temptation) | “If you are the son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’ “ (4:10-11, from Psalms 91:11-12) |
| Jesus’ Third Response | “It is said, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’ ” (4:12, from Deuteronomy 6:16) |
| Jesus as Messenger of the Lord | “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” (4:18-19, from Isaiah 61:1-2, 58:6) |
| John the Baptist as Messenger | “See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.” (7:27, from Malachi 3:1) |
| Obfuscation by Parable | “...I speak in parables, so that ‘looking they may not perceive, and listening they may not understand.’ ” (8:10, from Isaiah 6:9-10) |
| Household Conflict | “From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; they will be divided: father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against her mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.” (12:52-53, adapted from Micah 7:6) |

³⁴³ Luke 1:54-55.

³⁴⁴ Luke 1:70-75.

| Topic | Prophecy Historicized |
|--|---|
| Triumphal Entry to Jerusalem | "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!" (19:38, adapted from Psalms 118:26) |
| Cleansing of the Temple | "It is written, 'My house shall be a house of prayer': but you have made it a den of robbers." (19:45, from Malachi 3:1-2) |
| Rejection by Priests, Scribes & Elders | "What does this text mean: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone'?" (20:17, from Psalms 118:22) |
| David's Lineage | "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.'" (20:42-43, from Psalms 110:1) |
| Mission to All Nations | "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem." (24:46-47, from Isaiah 2:3) |

Luke appears to be more scrupulous in quoting to the actual text of Jewish (OT) Scripture than Mark. For example, this is clearly the case with the introductory prophecy used both by Mark and Luke regarding John the Baptist's role as messenger (although Luke is still a paraphrase). Luke's reference to the relationship of Jesus to David accurately quotes Psalms 110:1 as "until I make your enemies your footstool" rather than Mark's paraphrase "until I put your enemies under your feet."

Perhaps most intriguing is Luke's reach back to Isaiah as a precursor to Jesus' commandment for the disciples to start their ministry from Jerusalem. This comes just prior to his ascension. Isaiah reads: "For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." (Isaiah 2:3) Jesus reaches back to this prophecy to proclaim that "repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem." (Luke 24:47)

Like Mark, the Gospel of John makes relatively sparse reference to fulfillment of prophecy by Jesus. A total of six fulfillment quotations are noted. Of these, four are also found in Matthew and, in some cases, other synoptics.

John's Prophecies Historicized

| Topic | Prophecy Historicized |
|---|---|
| John the Baptist as Messenger | John says: "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said." (1:23, from Isaiah 40:3) |
| Triumphal Entry to Jerusalem | "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord -- the king of Israel!" (12:13, adapted from Psalms 118:26) |
| Triumphal Entry to Jerusalem | "Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion. Look, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!" (12:15, from Zechariah 9:9) |
| Unbelief of Crowd | "Lord, who has believed our message, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" (12:38, from Isaiah 53:1) |
| Unbelief of Crowd | "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, so that they might not look with their eyes, and understand with their heart and turn -- and I would heal them." (12:40, from Isaiah 6:10) |
| Protection of Disciples at Time of Arrest | "I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me." (18:9, similar to Isaiah 27:3)) |
| Disposition of Jesus' Clothing at Crucifixion | "They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots." (19:24, from Psalms 22:18) |

Prophetic fulfillments unique to John include the quotation from Isaiah 53:1 regarding unbelief and reference to the Psalms in dividing up Jesus' clothing at the scene of crucifixion. Also of note is that John apparently felt it important to *double up* on the fulfillment of prophecy in two instances -- the triumphal entry to Jerusalem and then reference to unbelief of the crowd. In both cases, two sets of prophecies are cited as fulfillments of these events.

James & Paul: James makes no use of prophecy as being fulfilled through the person of Jesus Christ. The letter of James makes only two references to scripture, one of which is unknown. James questions whether it is for nothing that the scripture says: "God yearns jealously for the spirit that he has made to dwell in us."³⁴⁵

James' other quotation immediately follows and is from Proverbs: "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."³⁴⁶

Paul presents views that are quite different from those of his early church counterpart James. In some of his writings (notably Romans and the letters to the Corinthians), the apostle Paul also reaches back to cite Jewish Scripture. However, most of his citations are for theological reasons, rather than the fulfillment of a particular prophecy.

For example, in his letter to the Romans, Paul writes: "Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! For he says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.'³⁴⁷

However, even among Paul's writings, there are glimpses of prophetic fulfillments. Again, in writing to the Romans, Paul states: "And so all Israel will be saved; as it is written, 'Out of Zion will come the Deliverer; he will banish ungodliness from Jacob.' 'And this is my covenant with them, when I take away their sins.'³⁴⁸

Paul also cites OT scripture to demonstrate God's long-standing plan to reach out to non-Jewish peoples:

As it is written, 'Therefore I will confess you among the Gentiles and sing praises to your name'; and again he says, 'Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people'; and again, 'Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples praise him'; and again Isaiah says, 'The root of Jesse shall come, the one who rises to rule the Gentiles, in him the Gentiles shall hope.'³⁴⁹

³⁴⁵ James 4:5, with no apparent OT source albeit with possible allusion to Psalms 42:1. The passage from Psalms 42:1 reads: "As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God."

³⁴⁶ James 4:6, from Proverbs 3:34.

³⁴⁷ Romans 9:14-15, from Exodus 9:16.

³⁴⁸ Romans 11:26-27, from Isaiah 59:20-21 and Isaiah 27:9.

³⁴⁹ Romans 13:9-12, from Psalms 18:49, Deuteronomy 32:43 Septuagint, Psalms 117:1, and Isaiah 11:10 Septuagint, respectively.

Finally, Paul bases his mission to previously unreached Gentiles by quoting “Those who have never been told of him shall see, and those who have never heard of him shall understand.”³⁵⁰

Similarly, in writing to the Corinthians, Paul points to the resurrection of Jesus both as fulfillment of prophecy and as an indicator of what awaits the Christian believer: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?”³⁵¹

To the Ephesians, Paul writes of Christ’s gift of grace: “When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people.”³⁵²

The letter to the Hebrews makes extensive reference to the Jewish Scriptures to demonstrate Jesus as the fulfillment of God’s prior commitments. For example, Hebrews cites the Psalms as referring to Jesus in stating “You are my son, today I have begotten you,” and also “You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek.”³⁵³

However, while Paul has been cited by some as the possible author of Hebrews, most scholars agree that the style is significantly different than that of Paul, leaving the author unknown. Consequently, Hebrews can not necessarily be considered as representative of Paul’s views.

Non-Canonical Gospels: Turning to the non-canonical gospel sources, one finds far less use of Jewish scriptural prophecy as being fulfilled in the person or message of Jesus. The Gospel of Thomas makes virtually no statements that directly signify the use of OT prophetic sayings. However, some sayings attributed to Jesus have their roots in Jewish Scriptures. Most notably, in Thomas 66: “Jesus said, ‘Show me the stone that the builders rejected: that is the keystone.’”³⁵⁴

Thomas also has Jesus saying: “This heaven will pass away, and the one above it will pass away.”³⁵⁵

And another passage in Thomas echoes the New Testament gospels and Old Testament Micah in stating: “For there will be five in a house: there’ll be three against two and two against three, father against son and son against father, and they will stand alone.”³⁵⁶

³⁵⁰ Romans 15:21, from Isaiah 52:15, Septuagint.

³⁵¹ I Corinthians 15:54-55, from Isaiah 25:7 and Hosea 13:14.

³⁵² Ephesians 4:8, from Psalms 68:18.

³⁵³ Hebrews 5:5-6, from Psalms 2:7 and 110:4, respectively.

³⁵⁴ This passage is a paraphrase of Psalms 118:22.

³⁵⁵ Thomas 11:1. This passage evokes elements of Psalms 102:25-27.

³⁵⁶ Thomas 16:3-4 drawing from Micah 7:5-6.

The Infancy Gospel of Thomas contains an interesting linkage between the actions of the lad Jesus and the Psalms. People who observed Jesus said: “Where has this boy come from? Everything he say happens instantly.”³⁵⁷

The Infancy Gospel of James also contains numerous actions which evoke OT commandments and events; most are not of a prophetic nature. However, Infancy James describes the visit of the astrologers to the infant Jesus bringing gifts of “gold, pure incense and myrrh.”³⁵⁸

The Gospel of Peter describes the actions of Jesus after his trial, when the Judeans “threw a purple robe around him and sat him upon the judgment seat and said, ‘Judge justly, king of Israel.’”³⁵⁹

The Gospel of Peter also presents an interesting reaction of the Judean leaders to their successful crucifixion of Jesus: “Then the Judeans and the elders and the priests perceived what evil they had don to themselves, and began to beat their breast and cry out ‘Our sins have brought woes upon us! The judgment and the end of Jerusalem are at hand!’”³⁶⁰

The Gospel of the Hebrews also contains passages with close links to prophetic scripture. In a version of Jesus’ baptism, the Hebrew gospel “that the Nazarenes read” says “The whole fountain of the holy spirit comes down on him.”³⁶¹

Then in coming out of the water, the Holy Spirit rests on Jesus and says: “My Son, I was waiting for you in all the prophets, waiting for you to come so I could rest in you. For you are my rest; you are my first-begotten Son who rules forever.”³⁶²

The Gospel of the Ebionites cites Jesus as saying: “I came to do away with sacrifices, and if you don’t stop sacrificing, you won’t stop experiencing wrath.”³⁶³

³⁵⁷ Infancy Thomas 4:3. This evokes passages in the Psalms which read: “For he spoke, and it came to be;” and “...for he commanded and they were created,” from Psalms 33:9 and 148:5, respectively.

³⁵⁸ Infancy James 21:11, comparable to prophecy of Isaiah 60:6.

³⁵⁹ Gospel of Peter 3:2. While not explicitly stated, this event can be interpreted as representing a fulfillment of OT passages are Zechariah 3:1-5 and Isaiah 58:2.

³⁶⁰ Peter 7:1, evoking Isaiah 3:9. Isaiah 3:9 reads: “The look on their faces bears witness against them; they proclaim their sin like Sodom, they do not hide it. woe to them! For they have brought evil on themselves.”

³⁶¹ Gospel of the Hebrews 3:1, similar to Isaiah 11:2. The passage in Isaiah 11:2 begins: “The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him....”

³⁶² Psalms 132:14 declares: “This is my resting place forever; here I will reside, for I have desired it.” And Psalms 2:7 ends this way: “... You are my son; today I have begotten you.”

³⁶³ Ebionites 6, drawing on Hosea 6:6. The parallel passage at Hosea 6:6 reads: For I desire steadfast lover and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.” While this passage is consistent with statements in Matthew for mercy, not sacrifice (9:13 and 12:7), it could be viewed as in conflict with Jesus declaration in Matthew 5:17-18 to fulfill rather than abolish the law.

And the Gospel of the Nazoreans (quoted by Jerome) states: “Out of Egypt I have called my son...for he will be called a Nazorean.”³⁶⁴

Summary of Prophecy Historicized: For the writers of the gospels of Matthew and Luke, it was of considerable importance to demonstrate that Jesus was the fulfillment of the Hebrew scriptures. This emphasis – particularly with Matthew – may have led to a spirit of overreaching, citing prophecies which are linked to Jesus only with some difficulty.

The other two gospel writers – Mark and John – show much less compulsion to demonstrate the link between Jesus and Old Testament prophecy fulfilled. Writers such as James and Thomas hardly care; the apostle Paul appears somewhat in the middle.

19. Prophecy Projected

Prophecy projected refers to events forecast by Jesus to occur *beyond* the period of his earthly ministry (particularly as recorded in the gospels).

Some of Jesus’ prophetic utterances are clearly of an eschatological nature; they are associated with events that will happen at the *end times* for humankind on the earth. Other prophecies seem to anticipate fulfillment during the lifetime of the disciples or others of Jesus’ generation.

Gospel Accounts: Matthew speaks of coming persecutions for the twelve disciples, including flogging in synagogue, hearings with governors and kings.³⁶⁵ To the current generation, he promises the judgment of Nineveh and the Queen of Sheba.³⁶⁶

And Jesus laments over the anticipated destruction of Jerusalem, saying “...not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.”³⁶⁷

Both Mark and Luke provide accounts similar to that of Matthew foretelling the destruction of the temple.³⁶⁸ However, Luke expresses Jesus’ desire to also “gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings,”

At this point, Luke does not explicitly forecast future destruction as do Matthew and Mark. However, later Luke has Jesus again lamenting the fate of Jerusalem, this time saying “...your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you

³⁶⁴ Nazoreans 1, comparable to Hosea 11:1 and Judges 13:5. Hosea 11:1 reads: “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.” Judges 13:5 foretells of Samson (to his mother) that “the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from birth.”

³⁶⁵ Matthew 10:17-18.

³⁶⁶ Matthew 10:41-42.

³⁶⁷ Matthew 24:2.

³⁶⁸ Mark 13:2 and Luke 13:33-34.

in on every side. They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave one stone upon another....”³⁶⁹

Then there is some ambiguity as to whether the end times were expected before the end of Jesus generation. An example is Jesus telling his disciples that: “Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”³⁷⁰

Just as Matthew makes the greatest use (of all four gospel writers) of previous prophecies, so this same writer has Jesus making the greatest number of predictions beyond the period of his earthly ministry. We start then with a review of prophecy projected as recorded by Matthew.

Matthew & Prophecy Projected

| Topic | Prophecy Projected |
|---|---|
| Fate of Chorazin, Bethsaida & Capernaum (Jesus' adopted hometown) | “Woe to you , Chorazin! Woe to you Bethsaida! ... But I tell you, on the day of judgment it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon than for you. And you Capernaum will you be exalted to Heaven? No, you will be brought down to Hades.” (11:21-23) |
| Future Condemnation for the Current Generation (Signs of Jonah and Sheba) | “The people of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the proclamation of Jonah, and see, something greater than Jonah is here! The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to listen to the wisdom of Solomon, and see, something greater than Solomon is here!” (12:41-42) |
| Explaining the Parable of the Weeds | “Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.” (13:40-43) |
| Judgment at the End of the Age | “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (13:47-50) |
| Sign of Jonah | “You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. An evil and adulterous generation asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah.” (16:3-4) |
| Jesus' Return (in the lifetime of disciples)? | “For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father; and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.” (16:27-28) |
| Disciples as Judges | “Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man is seated on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses |

³⁶⁹ Luke 19:43-44.

³⁷⁰ Matthew 16:27-28.

| Topic | Prophecy Projected |
|--|---|
| | or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold, and will inherit eternal life." (19:28-29) |
| Fate of the Wicked Tenants | As follow-up to the parable of the wicked tenants: "Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom." (21:43) |
| The Resurrection (already occurred) | "For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is God not of the dead, but of the living." (22:30-32) |
| Fate of Jerusalem | "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you, desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord' " (23:37-39) |
| Fate of the Temple | "You see all these (buildings of the temple), do you not? Truly, I tell you, not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down." (24:2-3) |
| Signs of the End of the Age | Response to disciples' question: "For many will come in my name saying, 'I am the Messiah!' and they will lead many astray. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not alarmed; for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places: all this is but the beginning of the birth pangs." (24:5-8) |
| Future Persecutions, Then the End | "Then they will hand you over to be tortured and will put you to death, and you will be hated But the one who endures to the end will be saved. And this good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world, as a testimony to all the nations; and then the end will come." (24:9-14) |
| The Desolating Sacrilege | "So when you see the desolating sacrilege standing in the holy place, as was spoken of by the prophet Daniel (let the reader understand), then those in Judea must flee to the mountains " (24:15-28) |
| The Coming of the Son of Man | "Immediately after the suffering of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." (24:29-31) |
| The Lesson of the Fig Tree (for this generation) | "From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away." (24:32-35) |
| The Need to Watch | "But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming." (24:36-44) ³⁷¹ |

³⁷¹ The need to be prepared for the coming of the Son of Man is emphasized with succeeding parables regarding the unfaithful slave, ten bridesmaids, and the talents. In both the parables of the unfaithful slave and the talents, the punishment for not being prepared is to be cast into the place where "there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (24:51, 25:30)

| Topic | Prophecy Projected |
|--|--|
| Judgment | “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world’ Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels ... And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.’” (25:31-46) |
| Jesus Future Role as Messiah | “You have said so (that I am the Messiah). But I tell you, ‘From now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.’” (26:64) |
| Jesus Future Role in Commissioning the Disciples | “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ... And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (28:18-20) |

Clearly, some of the Matthean prophecies are intended for fulfillment in the relatively short term, i.e. the lifetime of Jesus’ disciples or others of his generation. For example, Matthew speaks of coming persecutions for the twelve disciples, including flogging in synagogue, hearings with governors and kings.³⁷²

To the current generation, he promises the judgment of Nineveh and the Queen of Sheba.³⁷³ And Jesus laments over the anticipated destruction of Jerusalem, saying “...not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.”³⁷⁴

Other prophecies clearly refer to the end times or the “end of the age.” At one point, Matthew clearly links the end to a time when the gospel has been more broadly disseminated, with Jesus quoted as saying that “...this good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world, as a testimony to all the nations; and then the end will come.”³⁷⁵

Matthew then offers a more elaborate and ultimately upbeat follow-on: “And because of the increase of lawlessness, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. And this good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world, as a testimony to all the nations; and then the end will come.”³⁷⁶

³⁷² Matthew 10:17-18.

³⁷³ Matthew 10:41-42.

³⁷⁴ Matthew 24:2.

³⁷⁵ Matthew 24:9-14.

³⁷⁶ Matthew 24:12-14.

The eschatological emphasis is further punctuated at the closing of the gospel, with Jesus proclaiming to current (and future?) disciples that “I am with you always, to the end of the age.”³⁷⁷

Mark’s gospel has Jesus making no prophetic utterances in his early ministry. However, it is noteworthy that Jesus refers to himself *as a prophet* with the statement (in Nazareth) that: “Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house.”³⁷⁸

Like Matthew, Mark relates the parable of the wicked tenants. Unlike Matthew, Mark’s Jesus does not directly provide an eschatological meaning, i.e. the removal of the promise from Israel. Rather, Mark’s version of the parable is perceived as more clearly aimed at the chief priests, scribes and elders, leaving them with a stated (though unfulfilled) desire to “arrest him.”³⁷⁹

Mark also provides an account similar to Matthew of whether marriage occurs in heaven. But it is chapter 13 that Mark’s gospel focuses its eschatological energy. Mark’s chapter 13 parallels material (in the same order) as Matthew 24, with predictions of the fate of the temple, signs of the end, future persecutions, the desolating sacrilege, coming of the Son of Man, and need for watchfulness.

The differences between Matthew and Mark come in the *punch lines*, i.e. the morals of the stories. For example, Mark’s account of future persecution leaves out Matthew’s optimistic end note that “... this good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world, as a testimony to all the nations; and then the end will come.”³⁸⁰

Mark and Matthew also put somewhat different spins on the prophecy of the desolating sacrilege. Both accounts repeat verbatim the statement that false prophets will arise and lead many astray. With Mark, Jesus’ next and concluding remark is succinct: “But be alert; I have already told you everything.”³⁸¹

Mark and Matthew both offer statements of Jesus regarding the need for watchfulness. Both open their accounts with almost the same introduction: “But about that day (and/or) hour no one knows, neither the angels (of/in) heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”³⁸² But at this point, the two versions diverge. In Matthew, Jesus goes on to give examples of Noah, two in the field of whom only one is taken, then the thief. With

³⁷⁷ Matthew 28:18-20.

³⁷⁸ Matthew 6:4.

³⁷⁹ Matthew 12:12.

³⁸⁰ Matthew 24:9-14.

³⁸¹ Mark 13:23.

³⁸² Matthew 24:36 and Mark 13:32.

Matthew, Jesus ends by observing: “Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.”³⁸³

Mark has Jesus giving a different example to illustrate the need for preparedness -- the man on a journey who leaves his slaves in charge while away. While offering fewer illustrations, Mark’s punch line is both more elaborate and directive: “Therefore, keep awake -- for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.” (Mark 13:35-37)

Like Mark, Luke’s first reference to Jesus as prophet occurs with Jesus at the synagogue in his boyhood hometown of Nazareth. Luke has Jesus saying: “Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet’s hometown.” (Luke 4:24)

Luke echoes Matthew’s condemnation of the towns of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum.³⁸⁴ Like Matthew and Mark, Luke also provides an account similar to that of Matthew foretelling the destruction of the temple.³⁸⁵ Like Matthew (and unlike Mark), Luke expresses Jesus’ desire to also “gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings.”

At this point, Luke does not explicitly forecast future destruction as do Matthew and Mark. However, later Luke has Jesus again lamenting the fate of Jerusalem, this time saying “...your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side. They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave one stone upon another....”³⁸⁶

Unlike Matthew and Mark who launch similar chapter long eschatological discourses, Luke splits the primary eschatological views of Jesus.³⁸⁷ At first glance, Luke’s account appears to be a paraphrase (or Reader’s Digest version) of Matthew. However, Luke also manages to insert a few details not found in Matthew. For example, after discussing Noah, Luke adds a comparison with Abraham’s nephew Lot:

“Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot: they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, but on the day that Lot left Sodom, it rained fire and sulfur from heaven and destroyed all of them -- it will be like that on the day that the Son of Man is revealed. On that day, anyone on the housetop who has belongings in the house must not come down to take them away; and likewise

³⁸³ Matthew 24:37-44.

³⁸⁴ Luke 10:13-15.

³⁸⁵ Luke 13:33-34.

³⁸⁶ Luke 19:43-44.

³⁸⁷ Luke covers much of his eschatological views between a 15 verse segment in Chapter 17 and then a longer segment in Chapter 21.

anyone in the field must not turn back. Remember Lot's wife. Those who try to make their life secure will lose it, but those who lose their life will keep it."³⁸⁸

Both Luke and Matthew give the example of two women grinding meal, one of whom is taken and the other left. Luke includes another example indicating that "on that night there will be two in one bed; one will be taken and the other left." Then Luke offers the following punch line in response to the disciple's question of where those taken go: "where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather."³⁸⁹

Like Matthew, Luke's Jesus also offers future rewards for those who "left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not get back very much more in this age, and in the age to come eternal life."³⁹⁰ The wording is somewhat different than Matthew's; the message is essentially the same.

Luke also provides a parable similar to Matthew's ten talents. However, while Matthew's meaning is clearly eschatological, Luke's version appears more oriented to the here and now.

Matthew suggests that the worthless slave will be thrown "into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."³⁹¹ In Luke, the king issues the order to "...bring them here and slaughter them in my presence."³⁹²

And like Mark, Luke's version of the parable of the wicked tenants appears directed more at the "scribes and chief priests" rather than as a condemnation for the entire generation.³⁹³

In response to the question from the Sadducees about marriage in heaven, Luke offers a more readily understandable answer than is described by the other two synoptics. In Luke, Jesus more clearly illustrates his point by directly referring to the experience of the patriarchs:

Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage; but those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. Indeed they cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection. And the fact that the dead are raised Moses himself showed, in the story about the bush, where he speaks of the Lord as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and

³⁸⁸ Luke 17: 28-33.

³⁸⁹ Luke 17:34-37. Some scholars have interpreted this to mean that one should look for circling vultures to find those who have been left.

³⁹⁰ Luke 18:29-30.

³⁹¹ Matthew 25:30.

³⁹² Luke 19:27.

³⁹³ Luke 20:19.

the God of Jacob. Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive.”³⁹⁴

Matthew records that the crowd was “astounded” at Jesus’ response to the Sadducees.³⁹⁵ Luke is again more affirmative, stating that the scribes tell Jesus: “Teacher, you have spoken well.”³⁹⁶

Luke 21 provides the second half of Jesus’ eschatological vision. In contrast with Matthew and Mark, Luke consistently manages to offer a more upbeat view, even of ominous events. In describing coming persecution, only Luke’s gospel adds: “This will give you an opportunity to testify. So make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance; for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict.”³⁹⁷

Luke also echoes a passage earlier in Matthew (chapter 10) about being betrayed by “parents and brothers, by relatives and friends”, even warning that “they will put some of you to death” and that “you will be hated by all because of my name.” However, Luke then adds: “But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your souls.”³⁹⁸

In describing the destruction of Jerusalem, Luke’s Jesus predicts that “...Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles, *until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled*.” And in foretelling the coming of the Son of Man, only Luke adds: “Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, *because your redemption is drawing near*.”³⁹⁹

Luke ends Jesus eschatological discourse with the admonition: “Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the *strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man*.”⁴⁰⁰

Of the four gospels, John attributes the fewest prophetic utterances to Jesus. And the few relevant passages contain rather oblique references to forecast conditions.

John & Prophecy Projected

| Topic | Prophecy Projected |
|------------------------------|--|
| Resurrection at the Last Day | This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day.” (6:40) |
| Resurrection at the Last | “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will |

³⁹⁴ Luke 20:34-38.

³⁹⁵ Matthew 22:33.

³⁹⁶ Luke 20:39. Verse 40 goes on to note that the Sadducees “no longer dared to ask him another question.”

³⁹⁷ Luke 21:13-15.

³⁹⁸ Luke 21:16-19.

³⁹⁹ Luke 21:24,28.

⁴⁰⁰ Luke 21:36.

| Topic | Prophecy Projected |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Day | raise them up on the last day.” (6:54) |
| Judgment at the Last Day | “The one who rejects me and does not receive my word has a judge; on the last day the word that I have spoken will serve as judge...” (12:48) |
| Jesus Preparing a Dwelling Place | “In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.” (14:2-3) |

Three of the four citations noted refer to conditions on the last day – but with the term “last day” left undefined. The other reference comes from the well known chapter of John 14, regarding Jesus’ preparation of a dwelling place. However, even this leaves much to be desired. The passage is not clearly eschatological, but rather the timing is left indeterminate.

Paul & James: Like John, James appears to believe in the “last days”; however, for James the coming of the Lord is viewed as rather imminent. James rails against the rich, stating: “You have laid up treasure for the last days.” For others, James goes on to urge: “Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord.... See, the Judge is standing at the doors!”⁴⁰¹

James concludes his letter with an admonition: “...you should know that whoever brings back a sinner from wandering will save the sinner’s soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.”⁴⁰²

It is the apostle Paul who takes the apocalyptic seeds scattered by the synoptics, cultivates and grows them into a more cohesive theology in his writings.

⁴⁰¹ James 5:3,7-9.

⁴⁰² James 6:20.

The Eschatology of Paul

| Topic | Prophecy Projected |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Eternal Life of Christ | "We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him." (Romans 6:9) |
| Eternal Life of Believers | "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6:23) |
| No Separation from God | "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:38-39) |
| Migration to Heaven or the Abyss | But the righteousness that comes from faith says, 'Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' ' (that is, to bring Christ down) or 'Who will descend into the abyss?' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead)." (Romans 10:6-7) |
| The Future Salvation of Israel | "I want you to understand this mystery: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved...." (Romans 11:25-26) |
| Resurrection of the Dead | "Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? ... for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death." (I Corinthians 15:12-27) |
| The Resurrection Body | "But someone will ask, 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come? ... There are both heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one thing, and that of the earthly is another. ... What I am saying, brothers and sisters, is this: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality.'" (I Corinthians 15:35-53) |
| Future Presence with Jesus | "...we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence." (II Corinthians 4:14) |
| Heavenly Dwelling & Judgment | "For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure ... For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. ... For all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil." (II Corinthians 4:17-5:10) |
| Visions of the Third Heaven | "I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven -- whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows. And I know that such a person -- whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows -- was caught up into Paradise and heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat." (II Corinthians 12:2-4) |
| The Eternal Rule of Christ | "God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not |

| Topic | Prophecy Projected |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| | only in this age but also in the age to come.” (Ephesians 1:20-21) |
| The Future Position of Saints | “But God ... made us alive together with Christ ... and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” (Ephesians 2:4-7) |
| Offer to the Gentiles | “In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel.” (Ephesians 3:5-6) |
| Exaltation of Christ | “Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:9-11) |
| Paul’s Future Resurrection | “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.” (Philippians 3:10-11) |
| Heavenly Citizenship for the Saints | “But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory....” (Philippians 3:20-21) |
| Escape from Future Wrath | “...you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead -- Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming.” (I Thessalonians 1:9-10) |
| Coming of the Lord | “But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died ... For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call and with the sound of God’s trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever.” (I Thessalonians 4:13-17) |
| Timing of the Lord’s Return | “Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. When they say, ‘There is peace and security,’ then suddenly destruction will come upon them....” (I Thessalonians 5:1-3) |
| Eternal Destruction of Non-Believers | “For it is indeed just of God to repay with affliction those who afflict you ... when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, separated from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes to be glorified by his saints and to be marveled at on that day among all who have believed....” (II Thessalonians 1:6-10) |
| Timing of the Lord’s Return | “As to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we beg you, brothers and sisters, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as though from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord is already here. Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come unless the rebellion comes first and the lawless one is revealed, the one destined for destruction.” (II Thessalonians 2:1-3) ⁴⁰³ |

⁴⁰³ This text is viewed as a repudiation of those who expected the early return of Christ and, possibly, as a counter to the message of I Thessalonians which may have encouraged such hopes.

| Topic | Prophecy Projected |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Immortality of Christ | "...I charge you to keep the commandment without spot or blame until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ, which he will bring about at the right time -- he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords. It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see...." (I Timothy 6:13-16) |
| Avoiding False Teachers in Last Days | "You must understand this, that in the last days distressing times will come. For people will be lovers of ... Avoid them!" (II Timothy 3:1-5) |
| Heirs to Eternal Life | "This (Holy) Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior; so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life." (Titus 3:6-7) |

With the exceptions of Galatians and Philemon, all of Paul's letters contain references to the heavenly heritage of believers and/or Christ's future return. To a considerable extent, one's views of Paul's eschatology depends on the question of which letters truly bear his authorship. The letters for which Paul's authorship is most often questioned include Colossians, Ephesians, II Thessalonians, I/II Timothy, and Titus.⁴⁰⁴

Even excluding these epistles, there is plenty that appears of the coming kingdom. Paul's prophetic views essentially can be classified as two-fold. First, there clearly are numerous statements of eschatological doctrine, wherein Paul presents his vision of what occurs at the time of the return of Christ. Second, Paul repeatedly states his belief that followers of Christ have an eternal heritage, with the opportunity to live with Christ in heaven (with a new body) forever.

Both of these teachings have significantly shaped Christian doctrine. Both are elucidated most clearly in Paul. Similar references in the four gospels are much more ambiguous.

Paul can show both disdain and heavenly purpose in writing of eschatological matters. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul suggests: "But someone will ask, 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?' Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies."⁴⁰⁵

After describing the resurrection process and body, Paul concludes: "Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain."⁴⁰⁶

In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul himself can claim a vision of paradise. However, there is both a spiritual and physical price. From the spiritual side, Paul states that he "heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat."⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰⁴ This listing of epistles of dubious Pauline origin is suggested, for example, by editors of the NRSV, *Harper Collins Study Bible*, 1993. Paul's purported authorship of the book of Hebrews is even more widely questioned, for example, by editors of the NIV as well as NRSV.

⁴⁰⁵ I Corinthians 15:35-36.

⁴⁰⁶ I Corinthians 15:58.

⁴⁰⁷ II Corinthians 12:4.

And physically, Paul indicates that “...to keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given to me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated.”⁴⁰⁸ The thorn is never described though mentioned in other letters of Paul. This affliction is not removed, despite Paul’s prayers for mitigation.⁴⁰⁹

In his first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul offers his most complete description of what will occur at the time of the coming of the Lord. On two occasions, he reveals his motive, that being for believers to “encourage one another” with this message.⁴¹⁰

Non-Canonical Gospels: A variety of eschatological references are provided in a number of these writings. Some parallel those found in the New Testament; others evoke new and alternative teachings.

The Gospel of Thomas contains a number of sayings, some of which can be interpreted in either eschatological or present terms. For example, Thomas 10 reports Jesus as saying: “I have cast fire upon the world, and look, I’m guarding it until it blazes.”⁴¹¹

Then in Chapter 11, Jesus says: “This heaven will pass away, and the one above it will pass away.”⁴¹²

Some sayings of Thomas are of an even more ambiguous character. For example, Thomas 18 records the disciples as asking: “Tell us, how will our end come?” (v. 1) Jesus response is difficult to understand, except perhaps in Gnostic terms of escaping the created world and returning to the state of perfection that existed in the beginning: “Have you found the beginning, then, that you are looking for the end? You see, the end will be where the beginning is. Congratulations to the one who stands at the beginning: that one will know the end and will not taste death.” (v. 2-3)

Thomas 111 is perhaps also interpreted in similar Gnostic fashion, as Jesus states: “The heavens and the earth will roll up in your presence, and whoever is living from the living one will not see death.” (v. 1-2)

The Secret Book of James offers an interesting view of prophecy, post-John the Baptist. James reportedly asks Jesus: “Lord, how will we be able to prophesy to those who ask us to prophesy to them? For there are many who inquire of us, and who look to us to hear an oracle from us.” Jesus reply bears a touch of the macabre: “Don’t you realize that the

⁴⁰⁸ II Corinthians 12:7.

⁴⁰⁹ Paul writes: “Three times I appealed to the Lord about this (affliction), that it would leave me, but he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.’ So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.” (II Cor. 12:8-9)

⁴¹⁰ I Thessalonians 4:18 and 5:11.

⁴¹¹ The notion that this blaze is to be interpreted as present rather than future oriented is reinforced later by Thomas 82, wherein Jesus is indicated as saying: “Whoever is near me is near the fire, and whoever is far from me is far from the <Father’s> domain.”

⁴¹² Thomas 11:1. With the transitory nature of the first two heavens, the next available would be the third heaven which also is referred to by the apostle Paul in recounting his vision at II Corinthians 12:2-4.

head of prophecy was severed with John?” Jesus then goes on to state that he was speaking “parabolically”, but never offers a direct explanation other than to note that “prophecy issues from the head.”⁴¹³

The Dialogue of the Savior is interpreted by some as offering an apocalyptic vision; however, the fragmentary nature of the manuscript renders interpretation difficult. For example, in *The Complete Gospels* (SV), the editors suggest that the Dialogue “describes the journey of ‘a single soul’ from the abyss to the heights of heaven.”

The Gospel of Mary is also fragmentary and also poses what appear to be eschatological questions. At the outset, the question is asked: “Will matter be utterly destroyed or not?” The response of the Savior: “Every nature, every modeled form, every creature, exists in and with each other. They will dissolve again into their own proper root. For the nature of matter is dissolved into what belongs to its nature.”⁴¹⁴

Finally, it is noted that there is one known manuscript of the Gospel of Mark which contains an addendum to the book (following Mark 16:14) indicating that: “This lawless and faithless age is under the control of Satan, who by using filthy spirits doesn’t allow the real power of God to be appreciated.” Their request to Jesus (or the Anointed): “So, let your justice become evident now.”

The manuscript’s provides this response of the Anointed: “The time when Satan is in power has run its course, but other terrible things are just around the corner. I was put to death for the sake of those who sinned, so they might return to the truth and stop sinning, and thus inherit the spiritual and indestructible righteous glory that is in heaven.”⁴¹⁵

Prophecy Projected in Summary: Both works of the canonical New Testament and extra-canonical works contain numerous prophecies of future conditions. This is true across all of the works cited – unlike prophecy historicized which involves fewer references concentrated on fewer books. However as is the case with historicized prophecy, the greatest number of future-oriented prophecies are to be found in Matthew, Luke, and Paul – with a surprising number of references also in Mark’s gospel.

The types of future prophecies quoted of Jesus cover a wide gamut. Some clearly refer to anticipated conditions during the lifetimes of his listeners; others extend well beyond and may well be indefinite.

Each of the gospel writers presents a unique view of Jesus’ forward-looking prophecies. Matthew is most voluminous. Mark is sparing and somewhat dire, but has Jesus refer to

⁴¹³ Secret James 6:1-5.

⁴¹⁴ Mary 2:2-4. *The Complete Gospels* interprets this as indicating that in the end all things will dissolve back into their constituent natures, therefore presenting no long term spiritual value.

⁴¹⁵ This longer ending of Mark is found in a single known manuscript, Codex Washingtonianus, also sometimes known as the Freer Logion after the codice’s discoverer, Charles L. Freer.

himself as a “prophet.” Luke places a considerably more optimistic spin. John refers to the end times as the “last day” without defining this term.

The apostle Paul is clearly apocalyptic, emphasizing both the future return of Christ and the eternal heritage of Christian believers. And Thomas portrays the prophetic utterances of Jesus in proto-gnostic, elliptical fashion.

20. Salvation

For modern evangelical theology, salvation is the principal concept of Christianity. Salvation is what distinguishes those who are Christian and bound for heaven from those condemned to eternal damnation. What does Jesus have to say about salvation? The results are not necessarily what one might expect.

Gospel Accounts: The very term salvation is lightly used in the New Testament gospels. King James references are found primarily in Luke (5 references) and John (1). Neither Matthew nor Mark use the term salvation in the KJV – not even once.⁴¹⁶

The Greek word for *salvation* can be interpreted to mean safety or soundness. Luke’s uses of the term salvation follow:

From the Magnificat: “He has raised up a mighty savior (horn of salvation) for us in the house of his servant David.” (1:69)⁴¹⁷

Also from the Magnificat: “And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins. (1:76-77)

Simeon’s praise: “... for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.” (2:30-32)

Message of John the Baptist (as quoted from the prophet Isaiah): “...and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.” (3:6)

Jesus to Zacchaeus: “Today salvation has come to *this house*, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.” (19:9-10)

⁴¹⁶ Based on the KJV, per *Young’s Analytical Concordance to the Bible*, Twenty-Second American Edition. However, the non-canonical shorter ending of Mark 16 concludes in this fashion: “And all that had been commanded them they told briefly to those around Peter. And afterward Jesus himself sent out through them, from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal *salvation*.”

⁴¹⁷ The parenthetical note (horn of salvation) is not found in the direct text of the NRSV but is often included as a footnote.

For Luke, the message of “salvation” comes primarily from the lips of others – before Jesus has even begun his ministry. Jesus’ only recorded use of the word salvation is to a tax collector. And the offer of salvation is not just to one individual, but to those in “this house.”

The current canonical book of Mark does not include use of the term salvation – except in the shorter version which ends at verse 8 of Chapter 16. In this abbreviated version, salvation is the last word with the text reading as follows: “And afterward Jesus himself sent out through them, from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal *salvation*.”⁴¹⁸

John’s one and only use of the term comes from the lips of Jesus, directed to another sinner – the woman of Samaria:

Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him.”⁴¹⁹

This reference to “salvation is from the Jews” seems a bit odd. It is typically interpreted as meaning that the Messiah would be Jewish. A more colloquial interpretation of this passage comes from the Scholars version and reads this way: “You people (the Samaritans) worship God-knows-what; we worship what we know – ‘Judeans are agents of salvation,’ and all that.” In other words, Jesus comment comes across more as a put-down on Samaritan *half-breeds*, rather than as reflecting some profound spiritual insight about what salvation may mean.

Since the term “salvation” is used so seldom in the gospel accounts, we turn to the broader concept of salvation. Indeed, it could be argued that it is the concept that is of greater importance than the word itself. Webster’s Dictionary has defined salvation as a “...spiritual rescue from sin and death; saving of the soul through the atonement of Jesus; redemption.”⁴²⁰ It is to evidence of this concept -- as explicitly spoken by Jesus – that we now address.⁴²¹

In the gospel of Matthew, the first hint of Jesus having a program for salvation comes in the calling of disciples. Something clearly different is implied when Jesus calls Simon (Peter) and his brother Andrew, as Jesus commands: “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.”⁴²²

⁴¹⁸ Mark 16:8 (shorter ending, NRSV).

⁴¹⁹ John 3:21-23.

⁴²⁰ Webster’s *New World Dictionary of the American Language*, 1968.

⁴²¹ The focus of this discussion is on direct statements by Jesus rather than use of parables or allusions.

⁴²² Matthew 4:19.

Jesus then gives the Sermon on the Mount. But rather than providing an explicit formula for salvation, Jesus gives the Beatitudes -- identifying actions leading to rewards in heaven. He summarizes: "But *strive* first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these (material) things will be given to you as well."⁴²³ This message is not so much one of faith, but is more similar to that of works -- most famously espoused by James.

But then faith enters in, as Jesus heals the servant of a Roman Centurion, observing: "Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith. ... Go; let it be done for you according to your faith."⁴²⁴

Similarly, Jesus heals two blind men in response to an expression of their faith.⁴²⁵ And later, he heals a Canaanite's daughter despite initial reservations due to her expression of faith.⁴²⁶

Jesus gives the example of the Father following the whereabouts of sparrows. Then he offers: "Everyone who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others; I also will deny before my Father in heaven."⁴²⁷

Jesus uses the parable of the weeds to draw out a moral of condemnation versus salvation:

The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evil-doers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.⁴²⁸

Perhaps the closest that Matthew's Jesus comes to describing the path to salvation comes in response to the question of the rich young man: "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" Jesus responds at first with a litany of several Mosaic commandments: do not murder, commit adultery, steal, or bear false witness. Honor your parents and "love your neighbor as yourself."

The young man presses his luck: "I have kept all these; what do I still lack?" Jesus response: "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."⁴²⁹

⁴²³ Matthew 6:33.

⁴²⁴ Matthew 8:10-13.

⁴²⁵ Matthew 9:29.

⁴²⁶ Matthew 15:21-28.

⁴²⁷ Matthew 10:32-33.

⁴²⁸ Matthew 13:41-43.

⁴²⁹ Matthew 19:16,19,20-22.

Moments later, Peter presses his luck, asking what the disciples will get for leaving everything to follow Jesus. As part of the response, Jesus says that “everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields, for my name’s sake, will receive a hundredfold, and will inherit eternal life.”⁴³⁰

In his final week (before crucifixion), Jesus provides even more strident images of who may be saved versus those who won’t. After giving the parable of the two sons, Jesus goes on to say: “Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you” (i.e. chief priests and elders).⁴³¹

Jesus proceeds to tell the parable of the wicked tenants, then offers a similar observation: “Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom.”⁴³²

Just to make sure the point is not lost, Jesus finishes with a third parable, that of the wedding banquet. After the invited guests don’t show, the host finally resorts soliciting throughout the community to “invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.”⁴³³

Jesus also uses an apocalyptic vision to identify in another way those who will be saved. In effect, those who inherit the kingdom are those who gave food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, welcome to the stranger, clothing to the naked, care to the sick, visitation to the prisoner.⁴³⁴

Jesus’ final act recorded by Matthew is the commissioning of the disciples: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.”⁴³⁵

The Gospel of Mark is even less direct than Matthew. In Mark, Jesus only barely hints at issues of salvation and redemption.

The indirect theme of the book is apparent at the outset of Jesus’ ministry. After his baptism and temptation, Mark records that Jesus traveled to Galilee to spread the good news and proclaim: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news.”⁴³⁶ Here, the appeal is to believe in the “good news”, rather than to a more personalized message of Jesus as Savior.

⁴³⁰ Matthew 19:29.

⁴³¹ Matthew 21:31.

⁴³² Matthew 21:43.

⁴³³ Matthew 22:9.

⁴³⁴ Matthew 25:34-40.

⁴³⁵ Matthew 28:19-20.

⁴³⁶ Mark 1:15.

His next act, previously noted in Matthew is to call Simon and Andrew with the opportunity to “fish for people”.⁴³⁷ Later, in response to claims by scribes that Jesus is filled with the devil, Jesus proclaims: “Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin.”⁴³⁸

Jesus casts the spirit out of a boy whose father interviews on his behalf -- after the disciples had failed. To the father, Jesus says: “All things can be done for the one who believes.” The father: “I believe; help my unbelief.” At this point, Jesus commands the spirit to come out and “never enter him again.”⁴³⁹ In a similar incident, Jesus heals blind Bartimaeus due to his expression of faith -- not in Jesus but in Jesus power to heal.⁴⁴⁰

In another incident of spirit possession, the disciple John states that the disciples tried to stop another person (not a direct follower) from casting out demons “in your name.” Jesus orders the disciple not to stop him, going on to say: “Whoever is not against us is for us.”⁴⁴¹

Mark also provides an account of how the rich man can find eternal life and how those who leave home and relatives achieve eternal life. Both accounts are similar to those provided by Matthew.

In response to the request of brothers James and John to be seated on the right and left hand of Jesus in his glory, Jesus hints at his upcoming purpose: “For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”⁴⁴²

In the period of the passion week, Jesus compliments a scribe who echoes the importance to “love one’s neighbor as oneself.” Jesus comments: “You are not far from the kingdom of God.”⁴⁴³

It is only in the longer (canonical but disputed) ending to Mark that Jesus outlines a more succinct path to salvation: “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned.”⁴⁴⁴

⁴³⁷ Mark 1:17.

⁴³⁸ Mark 3:28-29.

⁴³⁹ Mark 9:23-25.

⁴⁴⁰ Mark 10:46-52.

⁴⁴¹ Mark 9:40.

⁴⁴² Mark 10:45.

⁴⁴³ Mark 12:33-34.

⁴⁴⁴ Mark 16:15-16. Jesus statement about salvation view belief and baptism is out of character with the rest of Mark, reinforcing questions about the authenticity of this longer ending (verses 9-20 of Mark 16). Even the relatively fundamental *NIV Study Bible*, 1985 indicates that: “The most reliable early manuscripts and other ancient witnesses do not have Mark 16:9-20.”

As in Mark, Luke's Jesus begins his ministry avoiding direct declarations regarding salvation. An early example of the indirect approach: "But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High ..." ⁴⁴⁵

Luke includes the account of the Roman centurion's faith, paralleling a passage in Matthew. At the home of a Pharisee, a woman described as a "sinner" anoints Jesus. In response to criticism, Jesus states: "Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little." ⁴⁴⁶

To a woman with hemorrhages who touches his garment, Jesus declares: "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace." ⁴⁴⁷ Later, Jesus heals ten lepers, similarly telling them: "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well." ⁴⁴⁸

Over the course of his ministry, Jesus message of redemption becomes increasingly direct. Following Peter's confession, Jesus explains: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it." ⁴⁴⁹

In sending out the seventy in pairs to various towns, Jesus instructs: "Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'" ⁴⁵⁰

In Luke, a lawyer tests Jesus, asking: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus asks: "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" The lawyer responds: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." Jesus affirms: "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live." ⁴⁵¹

Like Matthew, Luke's Jesus indicates that with God: "the hairs of your head are all counted. Do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows."

Unlike Matthew, Luke's Jesus goes on to say: "And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before other, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God; but whoever denies me before others will be denied before the angels of God."

⁴⁴⁵ Luke 6:35.

⁴⁴⁶ Luke 7:47.

⁴⁴⁷ Luke 8:48.

⁴⁴⁸ Luke 17:19.

⁴⁴⁹ Luke 9:23-24.

⁴⁵⁰ Luke 10:8-9.

⁴⁵¹ Luke 10:25-28. Unfortunately, the lawyer does not know when to stop, but asks another question: "And who is my neighbor?" This prompts Jesus to tell the parable of the Good Samaritan. Luke 10:29-37.

And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.”⁴⁵²

As in Matthew, Luke recounts Jesus admonishing his disciples not to worry about tomorrow, but rather to “...strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.”⁴⁵³ In Matthew and Luke, Jesus gives the parable of the wedding banquet; in Luke Jesus also gives more direct instruction: “But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”⁴⁵⁴

Jesus again emphasizes the cost of discipleship in the negative: “So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.”⁴⁵⁵ Conversely, in the affirmative, Jesus states that “...there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”⁴⁵⁶

Jesus recounts the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector at prayer. The prayer of the tax collector is simply: “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” The moral of the story is provided by Jesus: “I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.”⁴⁵⁷

As in Matthew and Mark, Luke’s Jesus encounters the rich man unwilling to sell his possessions and give the proceeds to the poor for “treasure in heaven.”⁴⁵⁸ And as in the other accounts, Peter proclaims the disciples’ abandonment of homes to follow Jesus. The response from Jesus is even more succinct than in the other synoptics: “Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not get back very much more in this age, and in the age to come eternal life.”⁴⁵⁹

And like Matthew, Luke’s Jesus meets up with Zacchaeus. Jesus says: “Today salvation has come to this house...” and then adds something not found in Matthew “...because he too is a son of Abraham.”⁴⁶⁰

After settling the dispute about which of the disciples is the greatest, Luke goes on with a somewhat different summation than is found in Matthew: “You are those who have stood by me in my trials; and I confer on you, just as my father has conferred on me, a

⁴⁵² Luke 12:7-10.

⁴⁵³ Luke 12:31.

⁴⁵⁴ Luke 14:13-14.

⁴⁵⁵ Luke 14:33.

⁴⁵⁶ Luke 15:10.

⁴⁵⁷ Luke 18:13-14.

⁴⁵⁸ Luke 18:22.

⁴⁵⁹ Luke 18:29-30.

⁴⁶⁰ Luke 19:9.

kingdom, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”⁴⁶¹

Luke is the only NT gospel writer who gives an account of the criminal crucified with Jesus who asks: “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Jesus grants the request: “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”⁴⁶²

Finally, as in Matthew, Luke’s Jesus gives a commission to his disciples before ascending to heaven, stating that “...repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.”⁴⁶³

The writer of the Gospel of John pursues a path of salvation that is markedly different from the three synoptics. It is John that presents “belief in me” by Jesus as perhaps the hallmark of his gospel.

Signs of the importance of belief come early in the book of John. To Nathaniel in response to his declaration of Jesus as the Son of God, Jesus says: “Do you *believe* because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.”⁴⁶⁴

John’s first recorded miracle is of Jesus turning water into wine at the wedding of Cana. John reports: “Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples *believed* in him.”⁴⁶⁵

John then has Jesus cleansing the temple (at the front rather than back end of his ministry). With Jesus in Jerusalem during the Passover, John writes that “...many *believed* in his name because they saw the signs that he was doing.”⁴⁶⁶

And from John the Baptist: “Whoever *believes* in the Son has eternal life; whoever disobeys the son will not see life but must endure God’s wrath.”⁴⁶⁷

Starting with Chapter 3, John’s account shifts into high gear. Rather than simply report the belief of others in Jesus, Jesus starts to talk of the need for others to believe in him. The references are numerous, both in the affirmative and negative. Consider first a comprehensive listing of those passages which are at least partially in the affirmative, starting with the story of Nicodemus:

⁴⁶¹ Luke 22:28.

⁴⁶² Luke 23:42-43.

⁴⁶³ Luke 24:47.

⁴⁶⁴ John 1:50.

⁴⁶⁵ John 2:11.

⁴⁶⁶ John 2:23.

⁴⁶⁷ John 3:36. Later, Jesus was to comment that: “You sent messengers to John, and he testified to the truth. Not that I accept such human testimony, but I say these things so that you may be saved.” (John 5:33-34)

Jesus to Nicodemus: “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” (3:3)

Later: “...just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him” (3:14-17)

To those who had observed a healing on the Sabbath: “Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life.” (5:24)

To the crowd who asks “what must we do to perform the works of God?” Jesus replies: “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” (6:28-29)

Later to the same crowd: “This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day.” (6:40) And again: “Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life.” (6:47-48) Elaborating: “Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day...” (6:53-54)

Teaching in the temple: “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.” (8:12)

To those who have believed in him: “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” (8:31)

“Very truly, I tell you, whoever keeps my word will never see death.” (8:51)

To the Pharisees: “I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” (10:9-11)

Later: “My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand.” (10:27-28)

To Martha at the death of her brother Lazarus: “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives

and believes in me will never die.” (11:25-26) And later: “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” (11:40)

To Greeks: “Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me the Father will honor.” (11:25-26)

To the crowd: “While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.” (12:36)

Jesus cries out to the crowd: “Whoever believes in me believes not in me but in him who sent me. And whoever sees me sees him who sent me.” (12:44-45)

To Thomas: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (14:6)

To Philip: “Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.” (14:12-14)

To Judas (not Iscariot): “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make my home with them.” (14:23)

To God the Father: “...the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours.... Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.” (17:8-11)

And more: “I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one.” (17:20-21)

To Pilate: “Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” (18:37)

To Thomas after resurrection: “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe. ... Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” (20:27-29)

At what appears to be the end of John, the gospel writer offers this concluding statement: “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in

this book. But these are written so that you may come to *believe* that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name ⁴⁶⁸

There are also passages stating the obverse, i.e. the consequences of unbelief. The first and probably the best known is John 3:18: Those who believe in him are not condemned, but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God.”

Speaking to the disciples on the eve of his arrest, Jesus uses a different term in place of belief, saying: “Whoever does not *abide* in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.”⁴⁶⁹

James & Paul: Though the term “salvation” is used sparingly in the four gospels (six times), it is used far more often elsewhere in the New Testament. Out of 42 NRSV references, 17 are found in the epistles of Paul – with other references in books such as Acts, Hebrews, I/II Peter and Revelation.

The apostle Paul appears to pick up where the author of John’s Gospel leaves off. John proclaims salvation through belief in Jesus. In Acts, Paul clearly reinforces this theme, most notably with the well known statement to the jailer who asks what he can do to be saved. Paul’s answer: “Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.”⁴⁷⁰

In his epistles, Paul takes and refines the message of belief in Jesus into a theology of salvation through faith -- available to Gentiles as well as Jews. To the Romans, Paul wastes no time in moving to this theme as he succinctly declares: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, ‘The one who is righteous will live by faith.’”⁴⁷¹

This theology is further developed in Chapter 3 as such concepts as grace, redemption and atonement are introduced. Paul says that:

...since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; it was to prove at the present time that

⁴⁶⁸ .” John 20:30-31. Chapter 21 follows but is believed by some scholars to have been a later appendix or epilogue added on to the Gospel of John.

⁴⁶⁹ John 15:6.

⁴⁷⁰ Acts 16:31. This statement by Paul also echoes a prior statement of Jesus to Zacchaeus as recorded by Matthew: “Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.” (Matthew 19:9-10)

⁴⁷¹ Romans 1:16-17.

he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus. Then what becomes of boasting? It is excluded. By what law? By that of works? No, but by the law of faith⁴⁷²

And later in the same epistle, Paul suggests that salvation is not necessarily a one-time act but a process as he writes: “For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers.”⁴⁷³

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul assumes the appropriation of God’s grace: “I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, for in every way you have been enriched in him...”⁴⁷⁴ With this introduction, Paul is then free to launch into a dissertation concerning more practical matters, ranging from divisions in the church to Paul’s future plans for travel.

To the Galatians, Paul mounts his most famous defense of faith as the path to salvation rather than works. After giving some background details relating his meetings with church leaders in Jerusalem (including Peter and James), he comes to the crux of his argument: “...yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law.”⁴⁷⁵

Paul reaches back to Abraham to note the future promise of salvation to the Gentiles through faith. And to the Jews, faith also becomes a *liberating path*, compared to the “curse of the law.”⁴⁷⁶

Paul goes on: “Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith.” Then Paul concludes the argument, getting to the punch line: “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise.”⁴⁷⁷

Liberated by faith, Paul now warns of the dangers of this freedom, noting: “... for you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the

⁴⁷² Romans 3:23-27.

⁴⁷³ Romans 13:11.

⁴⁷⁴ I Corinthians 1:4-5.

⁴⁷⁵ Galatians 2:15-16.

⁴⁷⁶ Galatians 3:13.

⁴⁷⁷ Galatians 3:23-29.

whole law is summed up in a single commandment, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”⁴⁷⁸

James takes a decidedly different tack than Paul. James gets even more to the point of what faith means for personal salvation. He asks rhetorically: “What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you?” His answer is simple: “... faith without works is dead.”⁴⁷⁹

And consider the closing statement of his epistle, James observes that “you should know that whoever brings back a sinner from wandering will save the sinner’s soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.”⁴⁸⁰ This, too, is an intriguing statement – hinting at the role that human as well as divine intervention can play in personal salvation.

Peter appears to be somewhere in the middle, based on the epistles that have been attributed to his authorship. In I Peter, he more clearly articulates a sentiment only implied by Paul – that salvation is a process, the results of which are known over time. Peter talks of “an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”⁴⁸¹

And again, he reinforces the theme that this is not a one-time event, but compares salvation to the process of life from birth to maturity. “Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation.”⁴⁸²

Non-Canonical Gospels: It is with this topic of salvation that the non-canonical gospels depart significantly from the canon of the New Testament. The Gospel of Thomas sets the tone right in the introductory prologue describing “the *secret sayings* that the living Jesus spoke...” In Thomas 1, Jesus suggests salvation is a process of discovery: “Whoever discovers the interpretation of these sayings will not taste death.”

The next saying recorded by Thomas reinforces this point: “Those who seek should not stop seeking until they find. When they find, they will be disturbed. When they are disturbed, they will marvel, and will rule over all.”⁴⁸³

To the disciples’ question of how the end will come, Jesus answers: “Have you found the beginning, then, that you are looking for the end? You see, the end will be where the

⁴⁷⁸ Galatians 5:13-14.

⁴⁷⁹ See James 2:14-26.

⁴⁸⁰ James 5:20. The *Harper Collins Study Bible* (NRSV) suggests that “the text has a possessive pronoun ... so it could be read as offering a double blessing, salvation of the *soul* and forgiveness of *sins*, to either the convertor or converted.”

⁴⁸¹ I Peter 1:5.

⁴⁸² I Peter 2:2.

⁴⁸³ Gospel of Thomas 2.

beginning is. Congratulations to the one who stands at the beginning: that one will know the end and will not see death.”⁴⁸⁴

Thomas follows up with Jesus saying: “Congratulations to the one who came into being before coming into being. If you become my disciples and pay attention to my sayings, these stones will serve you. For there are five trees in Paradise for you; they do not change, summer or winter, and their leaves do not fall. Whoever knows them will not taste death.”⁴⁸⁵

Thomas proceeds to offer a number of enigmatic sayings about who will and will not enter the Father’s kingdom or domain. The first example comes in response to a question from the disciples as to whether they must enter the kingdom as babies:

When you make the two into one, and when you make the inner like the outer and the outer like the inner, and the upper like the lower, and when you make male and female into a single one, so that the male will not be male nor the female be female, when you make eyes in place of an eye, a hand in place of a hand, a foot in place of a foot, an image in place of an image, then you will enter [the <Father’s> domain].⁴⁸⁶

And later, in response to the word that Jesus’ brothers and mother are standing outside: “Those who do what my Father wants are my brothers and my mother. They are the ones who will enter my Father’s domain.”⁴⁸⁷ While the incident of Jesus and his family is also found in the synoptics, only Thomas adds the sentence that it is these ‘who do what my Father wants’ are the ones who will enter the kingdom.

Then the Gospel Thomas ends with an unusual variation on salvation for women: “For every female who makes herself male will enter the domain of Heaven.”⁴⁸⁸

The Secret Book of James reflects an even more expressly Gnostic perspective emphasizing “fullness” rather than a more childlike approach to salvation: “I swear to you, no one will ever enter heaven’s domain at my bidding, but rather because you yourselves are full.”⁴⁸⁹

Secret James also offers a more conventional perspective: “I swear to you, none will be saved unless they believe in my cross; [for] God’s domain belongs to those who have

⁴⁸⁴ Thomas 18:2-3.

⁴⁸⁵ Thomas 19:1-4.

⁴⁸⁶ Thomas 22:4-7.

⁴⁸⁷ Thomas 99:2.

⁴⁸⁸ Thomas 114:3.

⁴⁸⁹ Secret James 2:6.

believed in my cross.”⁴⁹⁰ And Jesus further endorses the value of faith: “Congratulations to those who have not seen [but] have [had faith].”⁴⁹¹

The Dialogue of the Savior is interesting in that Jesus is consistently referred to as “Savior” throughout. In the canonical New Testament, this term is applied to Jesus only twice.⁴⁹²

The Gospel of the Nazoreans provides an account of the rich man asking what is the path to salvation. As in the three synoptics, Jesus starts with an answer similar to that of the three synoptics, emphasizing following the law and the prophets, then pressing further to suggest that the rich man sell everything and give it to the poor, then follow Jesus.

Unlike the synoptics, the account in the Nazorean gospel has the rich man begin to scratch his head as a sign of his discomfort with Jesus’ message. So Jesus responds:

How can you say that you follow the Law and the prophets? In the Law it says: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ Look around you: many of your brothers and sisters, sons and daughters of Abraham, are living in filth and dying of hunger. Your house is full of good things and not a thing of yours manages to get out to them.⁴⁹³

It is with this explanation (not found in the Synoptics) that Jesus then proceeds with the concluding note about a camel squeezing through a needle’s eye.

Salvation Summarized: When it comes to the topic of salvation, the New Testament gospels seldom use the term but often describe a concept analogous to that of salvation. Of the four gospel writers, cynic Mark seems most lukewarm on the concept. Matthew, Luke, John and then the apostle Paul talk of the process for entering the kingdom of heaven. James does not and Thomas does (somewhat).

In the few times when the term “salvation” itself is used (only in Luke and John), there is a two-fold meaning. Salvation comes not only as a result of forgiveness, but also through the Jews including David and Abraham.

For the synoptics, the *concept* of salvation appears to also comprise two elements: a) belief – whether in Jesus directly or more generally in the good news; and b) a clear sense of denial, repentance and giving up those things most dear to a person. Also evident is that salvation (in the form of the kingdom) often comes to those least expected.

For John, salvation is clearly linked to the need to “believe in me,” i.e. Jesus. Paul emphasizes this same theme, expanding it to include the concepts of faith and grace.

⁴⁹⁰ Secret James 5:2.

⁴⁹¹ Secret James 8:6.

⁴⁹² The two New Testament references to Jesus as “Savior” occur only in Luke 2:11 and John 4:42.

⁴⁹³ Gospel of the Nazoreans 6:3-4.

The non-canonical gospels take a decidedly more gnostic approach to the question of salvation – emphasizing the search for the mysteries of God. Thomas, for example, suggests that one should “not stop seeking until they find.” Secret James suggests those who enter will be those who are “full.” This work also emphasizes more traditional concepts of the cross and faith.

In summary, early Christian writings (in and outside the New Testament canon) suggest multiple paths to salvation may be possible. These paths appear to encompass elements of belief and faith, works and self-denial, and the process of seeking. When it occurs, salvation may be personal, or corporal (as for the whole household). Whether traveling all paths is required or just one path will suffice remains unclear. At the very least, those seeking salvation are invited to consider all options – in deciding which path(s) to follow.

21. Social Revolutionary

The 20th century quest for the *historical Jesus* engenders new viewpoints on who Jesus was and what his mission represented.⁴⁹⁴ One of the themes currently popular is that, as the product of an oppressed Jewish society, the message of Jesus was that of a social revolutionary.

Scholars who advocate this view tend to do so from either (or both) of two perspectives: (a) as a political revolutionary (e.g. zealot) who sought the overthrow of Roman authority and return to Jewish rule; and/or (b) as a radical social reformer representing the interests of the poor and outcast members of Jewish society against the ruling elites -- whether those elites be Jew or Gentile.

Much of the support for these views comes from a broader review of the social culture of the Roman Empire at the time of Jesus. Cross cultural studies from similar agrarian societies have also served as a point of comparison with social, economic and political conditions that are known or believed to have existed in first century Palestine.

This present research project addresses the question in a more focused context. The question is: what evidence for Jesus as a social revolutionary (pro or con) can be gleaned directly from New Testament canon and from early non-canonical gospel sources?

Gospel Accounts: Starting with Matthew, one potential rationale for a political *edge* to Jesus’ ministry is suggested early on through Herod’s reputed murder of the infants in the Bethlehem area. Only Matthew records this incident and the subsequent flight of father, mother and child to Egypt. Upon Joseph’s later return, he decides to locate in the Galilean town of Nazareth rather than back in Judea because of fear of the new ruler Archelaus, a son of Herod the Great.⁴⁹⁵

⁴⁹⁴ Perhaps the best known of the current scholars who advocate this view is John Dominic Crossan, for example, with his book *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*, 1991.

⁴⁹⁵ This incident is recorded in Matthew 2:13-23.

The possibility of class warfare is also suggested at the outset of Jesus ministry, based largely on his early association with John the Baptist. Matthew's theme of opposition to Pharisees and Sadducees is initiated by the Baptist who calls to them as: "You brood of vipers!"⁴⁹⁶

Matthew appears to make more of Jesus' role as an opponent of Jewish ruling classes than he does of Jesus as a radical social reformer or advocate of the poor and dispossessed. Consider the following statements from his Sermon on the Mount:

Jesus is clear to say: "Blessed are the poor *in spirit*." (5:3)

However, the beatitudes also suggest the potential that followers of Jesus may be persecuted. Jesus says: "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." (5:10-11)

Shortly thereafter, Jesus presses forward a comparison: "For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." (5:20)

Here Jesus seems to contradict himself. Just after condemning these elites, he suggests coming "...to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court...." (5:25) He also counsels turning the other cheek and the need to: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." (5:44)

Matthew clearly presents a theme of Jesus reaching out to social outcasts, but not of advocating social revolution. To the Pharisees who question Jesus for eating with tax collectors and sinners, Jesus responds: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ... For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners."⁴⁹⁷

Jesus then sends out the twelve disciples to proclaim the good news in a variety of Jewish communities. In addition to empowering them to heal, Jesus suggests that they take no money or bag. The disciples should not receive payment, but should expect hospitality because "laborers deserve their food." Bless those homes that are "worthy", but for those who are not welcoming, "...shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town."⁴⁹⁸

Jesus also counsels: "See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves."⁴⁹⁹ Jesus cautions that the disciples can expect

⁴⁹⁶ Matthew 3:7.

⁴⁹⁷ Matthew 9:12-13.

⁴⁹⁸ Matthew 10:10,13-14.

⁴⁹⁹ Matthew 10:16.

persecution and adds: “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.” This is followed by a request to forsake family for the good of the cause, a theme found in other revolutionary movements: “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.”⁵⁰⁰

After the disciples go out, Jesus has a discourse about John the Baptist and, here, takes a shot at the royal elites: “What then did you go out (in the wilderness) to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces.”⁵⁰¹ For prophets, there are few material comforts. He ends the discourse by condemning the unrepentant cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida.⁵⁰²

The first recorded act upon return of the disciples is of them picking and eating grain on the Sabbath. In response to the condemnation of the Pharisees, Jesus responds: “but if you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.”⁵⁰³

Jesus then heals a man’s withered hand, also on the Sabbath, commenting: “How much more valuable is a human being than a sheep! So it is lawful to good on the Sabbath.” Matthew records this as a seminal event for the Pharisees who had been scrutinizing the actions of Jesus. It was after this event that the “...Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him.”⁵⁰⁴

Herod (Antipas) hears reports about Jesus, believing that: “This is John the Baptist; he has been raised from the dead, and for this reason these powers are at work in him.”⁵⁰⁵ The reason is the previous execution of John at the request of Herodias his wife.

The intensity of the rhetoric escalates even before the death of the Baptist. Jesus calls the Pharisees: “You brood of vipers!”⁵⁰⁶ And later, Jesus responds to criticism from Pharisees and scribes because the disciples are not washing their hands before they eat. He does so in an unusual fashion, by calling forth the similarity with the commandment to honor one’s parents:

And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?
For God said, ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and ‘whoever speaks evil of
father or mother must surely die.’ But you say that whoever tells father or mother,

⁵⁰⁰ Matthew 10:34,37.

⁵⁰¹ Matthew 11:7-8.

⁵⁰² Matthew 11:21-24.

⁵⁰³ Matthew 12:7.

⁵⁰⁴ Matthew 12:12,14.

⁵⁰⁵ Matthew 14:1-2.

⁵⁰⁶ Matthew 12:34.

‘Whatever support you might have had from me is given to God,’ then that person need not honor the father.⁵⁰⁷

In approaching Capernaum, Peter is asked by collectors of the temple tax (collected annually on Jewish males) whether Jesus pays up. Peter answers: “Yes he does.” Subsequently, Jesus makes it clear that while he feels technically free from the tax, he will pay “so that we do not give offense to them.”⁵⁰⁸

After a dialogue with a rich man about what it takes to have eternal life, Jesus turns to his disciples and observes: “Truly I tell you, it will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven.”⁵⁰⁹

After the triumphal entry to Jerusalem, Matthew records that Jesus overturned the tables of the money changers and dove sellers in the temple, saying: “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer,’ but you are making it a den of robbers.”⁵¹⁰

After telling the parable of the two sons to the chief priests and elders, Jesus comments: “Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you.”⁵¹¹

Just to make sure they do not miss the point, Jesus follows up with the parable of the wicked tenants. Matthew records that: “When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them. They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.”⁵¹²

It is after this that the Pharisees and Sadducees question Jesus about paying taxes, marriage in heaven, and the greatest commandment. The first question involves direct political content and was asked, according to Matthew, with the intent to entrap Jesus. Jesus response to the question evades the trap: “Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”⁵¹³

It is following this that Jesus launches yet into his strongest public denunciation of the Pharisees and scribes. He accuses them of:

- Not practicing what they teach.
- Placing heavy burdens on others, and not helping to shoulder the load.
- Wanting the best seats and places of honor

⁵⁰⁷ Matthew 15:3-5.

⁵⁰⁸ Matthew 17:25-27.

⁵⁰⁹ Matthew 19:23.

⁵¹⁰ Matthew 21:13.

⁵¹¹ Matthew 21:31.

⁵¹² Matthew 21:45-46.

⁵¹³ Matthew 22:21.

- Locking people out of the kingdom of heaven.
- Valuing material gifts more than what makes the gift sacred.
- Tithing agricultural produce but neglecting justice and mercy and faith.
- Maintaining outward appearances while remaining full inwardly of greed and self-indulgence.
- Maintaining tombs of prophets even though they are descendants of those who shed blood of the prophets.

Immediately following this denunciation, Jesus concludes by prophesying the coming destruction of Jerusalem.⁵¹⁴

Jesus' next recorded encounter with the chief priests and elders does not occur until his arrest. Matthew records that one with Jesus cuts off the ear of the high priest's slave. Jesus responds: "Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword." Jesus also asks: "Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit?"⁵¹⁵

In standing before Pilate, Jesus responds to the question of whether he is king of the Jews with: "You say so."⁵¹⁶ When the chief priests and elders accuse him and then again questioned by Pilate, Jesus no longer answers.

Jesus is heard from for the last time in Matthew issuing the great commandment to the disciples:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.⁵¹⁷

Mark's gospel presents Jesus in similar fashion to Matthew. The incidents that Mark presents are, with few exceptions also found in Matthew. However, Mark sometimes provides added detail or a different slant. Mark also aims more of his critique at scribes while Matthew focuses his critique on Pharisees.

Like Matthew, Mark recounts Jesus dining with sinners and tax collectors. Mark goes further than Matthew to name the host of the dinner -- Levi the son of Alphaeus who has just been appointed a disciple.⁵¹⁸

⁵¹⁴ These denunciations and the forecast of Jerusalem's fate are contained in Matthew 23 through 24:2.

⁵¹⁵ Matthew 26:54-55.

⁵¹⁶ Matthew 27:11.

⁵¹⁷ Matthew 28:19-20.

⁵¹⁸ Mark 2:13-17.

Mark also provides similar accounts of the disciples plucking heads of grain and healing of the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath. Mark's Jesus also sends the disciples out into the villages, but with far fewer admonitions recorded. Herod hears about Jesus and comments in a more superstitious vein than is recorded by Matthew: "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised."⁵¹⁹

The Pharisees question Jesus because his disciples eat without washing hands. The Pharisees also test Jesus on the question of divorce (in the here and now) as compared with Matthew where the Sadducees ask about marriage after death. The Pharisees not that: "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her." Jesus responds: "Because of the your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you. ... Therefore what God has joined together let no man separate."⁵²⁰

Mark's Jesus also encounters the rich man and cleanses the temple (in this case a day after) his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. As in Matthew, Mark recounts the parable of the wicked tenants (aimed against the chief priests, scribes and elders), answers the Pharisee's question about paying taxes, and then the Sadducees about marriage in heaven.

Mark's Jesus condemns scribes rather than Pharisees for wanting to "...walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! *They devour widow's houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.*"⁵²¹

Jesus observes a widow putting in two small copper coins into the temple treasure, while the rich deposit larger sums. He observes that: "...this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."⁵²²

Jesus then foretells the coming destruction of the temple and observes that for the disciples: "As for yourselves, beware; for they will hand you over to councils; and you will be beaten in synagogues; and you will stand before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them."⁵²³

⁵¹⁹ Mark 6:15.

⁵²⁰ Mark 10:2-12.

⁵²¹ Mark 12:38-40, the *italicized* portions are found exclusively in Mark.

⁵²² Mark 12:43-44.

⁵²³ Mark 12:43-44..Matthew places this warning earlier in the ministry of Jesus, at the time the disciples are sent out into the villages to heal.

Mark starts the next chapter by noting that the chief priests and scribes are "... looking for a way to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him; for they said, 'Not during the festival, or there may be a riot among the people.'"⁵²⁴

A woman anoints Jesus with costly nard, provoking some to comment angrily that the ointment could have been sold and the money given to the poor. Jesus responds: "Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish...."⁵²⁵

Like Matthew, Mark recounts one of Jesus' allies cutting off the ear of the slave of the high priest upon his arrest. Unlike Matthew, Jesus issues no reprimand but, like Matthew, complains of being treated by the authorities as a bandit.

Pilate asks Jesus if he is King of the Jews to which the answer is given as in Matthew: "You say so."⁵²⁶ Finally, the longer version of Mark also has Jesus issuing a version of the great commandment: "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation."

On to Luke, whose gospel is full of social interactions. In many (but not all) of these interactions, Jesus serves as an advocate for the poor and underprivileged.

The first public act of Jesus' ministry (recorded in detail only in Luke) is of Jesus rejection in his hometown after declaring himself the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. The last comment Jesus makes before the audience drives him out of town relates to the only leper being healed by Elisha, Naaman the Syrian.⁵²⁷

Luke's first recorded conflict with the Pharisees and teachers of the law comes when the paralyzed man is let down through the roof of a house where Jesus is teaching. The problem for the Pharisees occurs when Jesus not only heals but also forgives the sins of the paralytic. Luke records the reaction of the entire crowd rather than of the Pharisees as: "We have seen strange things today."⁵²⁸

Like Matthew and Mark, Luke records the complaints of the Pharisees and scribes over Jesus being entertained at the home of the tax collector Levi. This is followed by the incident of picking grain and healing a man with a withered hand on two separate Sabbaths.

Like Matthew, Luke's Jesus heals the slave of a Roman centurion. And in another parallel, Luke records the dialogue with John's disciples. After commenting that "the least in the kingdom of God is greater than he (John)," only Luke parenthetically records

⁵²⁴ Mark 14:1-2.

⁵²⁵ Mark 14:6-7.

⁵²⁶ Mark 15:2.

⁵²⁷ Luke 4:16-30.

⁵²⁸ Luke 5:26.

the onlookers: “And all the people who heard this, including the tax collectors, acknowledged the *justice of God*, because they had been baptized with John’s baptism. But by refusing to be baptized by him, the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God’s purpose for themselves.”⁵²⁹

All three synoptics record the anointing of Jesus by a woman reputed to be a sinner. Only Luke mentions that this occurred at the home of a Pharisee.⁵³⁰ Luke omits the account of Jesus saying the poor are always with you; rather Luke has Jesus tell the parable of the two debtors to his host. The moral of the story: the person with the greater debt forgiven will love the creditor more.

Jesus concludes: “You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.” Then, to the woman: “Your sins are forgiven.”⁵³¹

Like the other synoptics, Luke also records the commissioning of the disciples to teach on in villages and the subsequent interest of Herod Antipas in the activities of Jesus. Only Luke indicates the success of the disciples “...bringing the good news and curing diseases everywhere.”

And only Luke actually purports to cite Herod: “John I beheaded; but who is this about whom I hear such things?”⁵³² Luke then indicates that Herod actually tried to see Jesus; however, the outcome of this initiative is not described.

As in Matthew and Mark, Jesus refuses to stop another casting out demons in his name. The next event recounted appears solely in Luke. The disciples enter a Samaritan village to make ready for Jesus, but are not warmly received. James and John ask if Jesus wants to “command fire to come down from heaven and consume them.”⁵³³ Jesus turns and rebukes these disciples, then they travel to another village.

Jesus gives a culturally radical message to would be followers. One wants to follow Jesus but bury his father first. Jesus says: “Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” Another first wants to say farewell to those at home. To this person, Jesus states: “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”⁵³⁴

⁵²⁹ Luke 7:28-29.

⁵³⁰ Both Matthew and Mark identify the home as that of Simon the leper. Luke identifies the home as that of Simon the Pharisee.

⁵³¹ Luke 7:46-48.

⁵³² Luke 9:6,9.

⁵³³ Luke 9:54.

⁵³⁴ Luke 9:62.

Luke has Jesus sending an expanded group of 70 on a second mission to villages in pairs. The advance directives are similar to those provided earlier to the 12 disciples. In this case, he suggests taking no sandals and greeting no one in the road. He warns that: “I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves.”⁵³⁵ Luke has Jesus end his admonitions with particular condemnation of the cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida.

As occurred earlier, the 70 experience success, returning and saying: “Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us.”⁵³⁶ Jesus follows up with observations regarding spiritual warfare that unique to the four gospels:

I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.⁵³⁷

In a continuing pattern, Luke tells of the lawyer who asks what he must do to inherit eternal life. Luke’s Jesus provides a response similar to that of the other synoptics. But only in Luke, the lawyer presses forward with another question: “And who is my neighbor?” This leads Jesus to the parable of the good Samaritan.

Only Luke gives the account of Jesus visiting the home of Mary listening at Jesus’ feet while Martha busies herself with “many tasks”. Jesus notes: “Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.”⁵³⁸

When Jesus is casting out a demon, some in the crowd watching exclaim: “He casts out demons by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons.” Others demand a sign from heaven. Jesus responds: “Every kingdom divided against itself becomes a desert, and house falls on house. If Satan also is divided against himself how will his kingdom stand?”⁵³⁹

Like Matthew, Luke tells of Jesus interacting with Pharisees over the washing of hands before dining. While Matthew’s account is directed at the disciples, Luke’s is aimed directly at Jesus while dining at the home of a Pharisee. In Matthew, Jesus counters with the comparison to honoring one’s parents, broken when a person gives to God. In Luke, Jesus responds with a direct assault on Pharisees: “Now you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness.”⁵⁴⁰

Luke has Jesus go on to criticize Pharisees for tithing but neglecting “justice and the love of God,” for taking the seats of honor in synagogues and places of respect in the market.

⁵³⁵ Luke 10:3.

⁵³⁶ Luke 10:17.

⁵³⁷ Luke 10:18-20.

⁵³⁸ Luke 10:40-42.

⁵³⁹ Luke 11:14-18.

⁵⁴⁰ Luke 11:39.

He proclaims: “Woe to you! For you are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without realizing it.”

A lawyer gets into the act, saying that Jesus’ words insult them too. Jesus response: “Woe also to you lawyers! For you load people with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not lift a finger to ease them.”⁵⁴¹ It is from this time that the scribes and Pharisees become hostile, seeking to entrap Jesus.

Unique to Luke’s gospel are accounts of two political events: Galileans whose “blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices”; and 18 people were killed by the collapse of the tower of Siloam. Regarding the first event, Jesus comments: “Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did.” Regarding the tower, Jesus rhetorically asks: “...do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.”⁵⁴²

Jesus heals a crippled woman at a synagogue on the Sabbath. The synagogue leader criticizes Jesus, who responds: “You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on this Sabbath day?”⁵⁴³

On another Sabbath, Jesus heals a man with dropsy while traveling to the home of a Pharisee to dine. Aware of the likely concern, Jesus gives the example of a child or an ox who falls into a well on the Sabbath also being rescued.

Noticing how guests choose their seats, Jesus comments: “Do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host. ... But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place...” Then, to the host, Jesus suggests that rather than inviting friends or relatives or rich neighbors: “...invite the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind.”⁵⁴⁴

Later to a large crowd, Jesus proclaims: “...none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all of your possessions.”⁵⁴⁵ In the crowd were tax collectors and sinners, the occasion for grumbling from Pharisees and scribes. Jesus responds with the parable of the lost sheep, concluding: “Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.”⁵⁴⁶

⁵⁴¹ Luke 11:42-46.

⁵⁴² Luke 13:1-5.

⁵⁴³ Luke 13:15-16.

⁵⁴⁴ Luke 14:7-10,13.

⁵⁴⁵ Luke 14:33.

⁵⁴⁶ Luke 15:7.

To make sure his point is not missed, Jesus follows up with parables of the lost coin, the prodigal son and the dishonest manager. In concluding, Jesus comments: “No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”⁵⁴⁷

At this, the Pharisees whom Luke characterizes as “lovers of money” ridicule Jesus. In return, Jesus offers two comments, first, that “...what is prized by human beings is an abomination in the sight of God.” Second, it is of interest that Jesus comes back to denounce use of force and, in turn, reinforce the value of the law: “But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away, than for one stroke of a letter in the law to be dropped.”⁵⁴⁸

Of further note, Jesus goes on to condemn adultery and then relate the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in the afterlife. The parable ends by reinforcing Jesus’ earlier point: “If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.”⁵⁴⁹

On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus cleanses ten lepers. Only one, a Samaritan, returns to thank Jesus. In return, Jesus then asks: “Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner? ... Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.”

The Pharisees ask Jesus when the kingdom of God is coming. It is here that Jesus makes it plain: “The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There it is!’ For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you.”⁵⁵⁰

Of the gospel writers, only Luke has Jesus tell the parable of the Pharisee and tax collector. This parable is given in response to what Luke describes as “some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt.”⁵⁵¹

People bring “even infants” to Jesus, dismaying the disciples. Jesus indicates that “...whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.”⁵⁵²

Then, as in the other synoptics, Luke responds to the ruler who asks what he must do to “inherit eternal life.” While the responses in all three gospels are very similar, there is one interesting difference. Matthew and Mark (not generally noted as being sympathetic to the poor), suggest that the rich man “give” the money from the sale of his possessions to the poor. Luke uses the term “distribute” the money to the poor, implying a more

⁵⁴⁷ Luke 16:13.

⁵⁴⁸ Luke 16:14-17.

⁵⁴⁹ Luke 16:31.

⁵⁵⁰ Luke 17:19-21.

⁵⁵¹ Luke 18:9.

⁵⁵² Luke 18:17.

active role from the rich man in making sure that those who need assistance get what they need.

Only Luke tells the story of Zacchaeus, a man who says to the Lord: “Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.”⁵⁵³ This passage, too, implies a very active role from a tax collector in assuring restitution above and beyond the bare minimum.

As in Matthew, Luke’s Jesus weeps over Jerusalem and its future. Luke has Jesus provide a more graphic depiction of Israel’s current condition and fate:

If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side. They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another; because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God.⁵⁵⁴

Then, as in Matthew, Jesus enters the temple and proceeds to clean out those selling things there.

As in Matthew and Mark, the chief priests and scribes ask Jesus whether it is lawful to pay taxes to the emperor. All three synoptics comment on the motives of the questioners. Matthew states that Jesus is aware of their “malice”, Mark of their “hypocrisy”, and Luke of their “craftiness”.

Luke contains the Sadducees question about resurrection and marriage. Only Luke records that some of the scribes compliment Jesus after hearing his answer: “Teacher, you have spoken well.”⁵⁵⁵ Despite this compliment, Jesus soon proceeds to denounce the scribes “in the hearing of all the people”⁵⁵⁶ And like Mark, Jesus is reported as then observing a poor widow making her meager offering amidst the more extravagant offerings of the well to do.

Just prior to making his final journey to the Mount of Olives, Luke records Jesus commenting on two items of interest. The first represents a reversal of prior instructions when disciples ministered in villages: “When I sent you out without a purse, bag, or sandals, did you lack anything? ... But now, the one who has a purse must take it, and likewise a bag. And the one who has no sword must sell his cloak and buy one.” To this, the disciples offer: “Lord, look, here are two swords.” Jesus says only: “It is enough.”⁵⁵⁷

⁵⁵³ Luke 19:8.

⁵⁵⁴ Luke 19:42-44.

⁵⁵⁵ Luke 20:39.

⁵⁵⁶ Luke 20:45.

⁵⁵⁷ Luke 22:35-36,38.

Shortly thereafter, Jesus is arrested and a disciple cuts off the right ear of the high priest's slave. Jesus responds: "Nor more of this!" And unlike the other two synoptics, Luke states that Jesus then touched and healed the wound ear.

In front of the elders, chief priests and scribes, Jesus is asked if he is the Messiah. Uncharacteristically, Mark has Jesus respond directly: "I am."⁵⁵⁸ Matthew quotes the response as being somewhat less direct: "You have said so."⁵⁵⁹ In Luke, Jesus' response is even more ambiguous: "If I tell you, you will not believe; and if I question you, you will not answer."⁵⁶⁰ Shortly thereafter, to a question from Pilate as to whether Jesus is king of the Jews, Luke quotes the same response as do the other two synoptics: "You say so."

Only Luke records a subsequent audience of Jesus before King Herod.⁵⁶¹ Consistent with his earlier accounts, Luke states that: "When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had been wanting to see him for a long time, because he had heard about him and was hoping to see him perform some sign." Herod questions Jesus "at some length, but Jesus gave him no answer."⁵⁶²

The chief priests and scribes are there to accuse Jesus. Herod and his soldiers then mock him, even putting "an elegant robe" on Jesus. Luke concludes with a political aside: "That same day Herod and Pilate became friends with each other; before this they had been enemies."⁵⁶³

After Jesus' resurrection, Luke ends his gospel on a note that also serves as a preface to what will come in Acts: "...repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. As see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." Of the four gospel writers, only Luke then records the ascension of Jesus "up into heaven." He concludes that the observers "...returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God."⁵⁶⁴

The first indication of Jesus as a social revolutionary in the Gospel of John is one of the last mentioned by the three synoptics -- cleansing of the temple. John is more descriptive in setting the scene:

⁵⁵⁸ Mark 14:62.

⁵⁵⁹ Matthew 26:64.

⁵⁶⁰ Luke 22:67.

⁵⁶¹ This is Herod Antipas, tetrarch of the northern regions of Galilee and Perea, who was probably in Jerusalem for the Passover.

⁵⁶² Luke 23:8-9.

⁵⁶³ Luke 23:12.

⁵⁶⁴ Luke 24:47-53.

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, 'Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!' His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for your house will consume me.'⁵⁶⁵

John's first recorded contact between Jesus and a member of the Jewish establishment comes with the evening visit of Nicodemus to Jesus. Rather than speak of temporal, material issues, the conversation is wholly devoted to matters of spiritual rebirth and eternal life.

Subsequently, John records that Jesus decides to leave Judea for a return to Galilee, because of reports the Pharisees have heard that Jesus is now baptizing more disciples than John. It is on this journey that Jesus has his encounter with the Samaritan woman. She immediately brings up the issue of social contact between Jews and Samaritans: "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?"

John's Jesus avoids a political or social response, but rather immediately elevates the interaction to a spiritual discourse. Jesus says: "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."⁵⁶⁶ When the disciples return, they are "astonished" that Jesus is speaking with a woman, but no one dares to ask why.

John offers the (parenthetical) observation that, upon his return to Galilee, not much should be expected since "Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in the prophet's own country." However, the response is better than may have been expected since: "When he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, since they had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the festival; for they too had gone to the festival."⁵⁶⁷

Jesus goes back to Jerusalem and heals a man by a pool at the Sheep Gate on the Sabbath. The description of this miracle is unique to John's gospel, but the questioning Jesus receives is consistent with other gospel accounts -- only in this case it is directed to the person healed rather than the healer: "It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your mat."⁵⁶⁸

Later, after again finding Jesus, John records that: "... the Jews started persecuting Jesus, because he was doing such things on the Sabbath." Jesus answers with a comment that

⁵⁶⁵ John 2:13-17. The quotation is from Psalm 69:9.

⁵⁶⁶ John 4:9-10. John's gospel also offers the parenthetical note that "Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans."

⁵⁶⁷ John 4:43-44.

⁵⁶⁸ John 5:10.

provides little of the rationale suggested by the synoptics, but rather stating simply: “My Father is still working, and I also am working.”⁵⁶⁹

Back again in Galilee, Jesus this time arouses the ire of others for his rather non-temporal comment that “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” In this case, familiarity does breed contempt: “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven.’”⁵⁷⁰

John goes on to note that his teachings were difficult to accept, and at this point “... many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him.”⁵⁷¹ Things apparently were even worse further south: “He did not wish to go about in Judea because the Jews were looking for an opportunity to kill him.”⁵⁷²

Jesus refuses to travel to a festival in Jerusalem with his brothers, but later goes “as it were in secret.” John indicates that many were looking for Jesus with “considerable complaining about him among the crowds.”⁵⁷³

Jesus finally shows up teaching in the temple. Again, the message is not social or political, but spiritual: “Did not Moses give you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why are you looking for an opportunity to kill me?” The crowd responds: “You have a demon! Who is trying to kill you?”⁵⁷⁴

Despite this disavowal, John records that moments later there is an attempt to arrest him. At this time, the leadership becomes involved: “The Pharisees heard the crowd muttering such things about him, and the chief priests and Pharisees sent temple police to arrest him.”⁵⁷⁵

On the last day of the festival, the crowd appears divided between those who believe Jesus is a prophet or even the Messiah and those who still want him arrested. The extent of class divisions within first century Palestine emerges in the revealing dialogue that follows -- also revealing some division appears within even the ranks of the Pharisees:

Then the temple police went back to the chief priests and the Pharisees, who asked them, ‘Why did not you arrest him?’ The police answered, ‘Never has anyone spoken like this!’ Then the Pharisees replied, ‘Surely you have not been deceived too, have you? Has any one of the authorities or of the Pharisees believed in him? But this crowd, which does not know the law -- they are

⁵⁶⁹ John 5:16-17.

⁵⁷⁰ John 6:41-43.

⁵⁷¹ John 6:66.

⁵⁷² John 7:1.

⁵⁷³ John 7:10-12. This was the Festival of Booths or Tabernacle, also known as Sukkoth, as seven day festival in October.

⁵⁷⁴ John 7:19-20.

⁵⁷⁵ John 7:32.

accused.’ Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus before, and who was one of them, asked, ‘Our law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing to find out what they are doing, does it?’ They replied, ‘Surely you are not also from Galilee, are you? Search and you will see that no prophet is to arise from Galilee.’⁵⁷⁶

The very next morning the scribes and Pharisees put Jesus to the test, bringing a woman who has been caught in adultery. They come to the point quickly: “... Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” Jesus again takes a political question and provides a spiritual answer: “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.”⁵⁷⁷ John reports that the elders left “one by one” until Jesus is left alone with the woman standing before him.

To a group that believes in him, there is an exchange that becomes increasingly hostile. Jesus starts by talking about the relationship to father Abraham, goes on to question their legitimacy stating that: “You are from your father the devil...” His listeners return the fire: “Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?” The breaking point is reached when Jesus says: “Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am.” At this, stones are picked up to be hurled, but “Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.”⁵⁷⁸

John’s second account of a Sabbath healing is of a blind man. As with the earlier healing, the Pharisees question the person healed rather than Jesus directly, saying: “This man is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath.”⁵⁷⁹ In this instance, John again records some division between the Pharisees.

As in the earlier healing, Jesus meets up again later with the former blind man. This time, Pharisees are at the scene. Jesus tells of his role as the good shepherd. John records that:

Again the Jews were divided because of these words. Many of them were saying, ‘He has a demon and is out of his mind. Why listen to him?’ Others were saying, ‘These are not the words of one who has a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?’⁵⁸⁰

At the festival of the Dedication, Jesus is walking in the temple portico of Solomon and is asked: “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.”

⁵⁷⁶ John 7:45-52.

⁵⁷⁷ John 8:4-7.

⁵⁷⁸ John 8:44-59.

⁵⁷⁹ John 9:16.

⁵⁸⁰ John 10:19-21.

Jesus responds: “I have told you, and you do not believe.” He goes on to declare that: “The Father and I are one.”⁵⁸¹

For the third time, John records that the Jews take up stones to stone Jesus. But the dialogue continues, followed by an attempt to arrest Jesus, but “he escaped from their hands.”⁵⁸²

Jesus travels east of the Jordan, attracting an audience. Hearing of the illness of Lazarus in Bethany, Jesus decides to return to Judea. The disciples try to dissuade him: “Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and you are going there again?” Jesus again offers a transcendental response to a very practical matter: “Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. ...”⁵⁸³

John indicates that after the healing of Lazarus, many believed but some went to the Pharisees reporting this latest development. This occasions a meeting of the council (or Sanhedrin), affording a second look into the workings of Jewish leadership:

“So the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the council, and said, ‘What are we to do? This man is performing many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation.’ But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, ‘You know nothing at all! You do not understand that is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed.’ He did not say this on his own, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jews was about to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the dispersed children of God. So from that day on they planned to put him to death.”⁵⁸⁴

John records that Jesus again retreated, going to the town of Ephraim near the wilderness. The Passover comes, with many again looking for Jesus in the temple. This time, the “chief priest and the Pharisees had given orders that anyone who knew where Jesus was should let them know, so that they might arrest him.”⁵⁸⁵

Once again, Jesus first shows up at the home of Lazarus in Bethany, a suburb of Jerusalem. The crowd finds out and shows up. John writes: “So the chief priests planned

⁵⁸¹ John 10:24-30. This winter festival of the Dedication (or Hanukkah) takes place in December, celebrating the rededication of the temple by Judas Maccabeus in 164 BCE.

⁵⁸² John 10:39.

⁵⁸³ John 11:8-9.

⁵⁸⁴ John 11:45-53.

⁵⁸⁵ John 11:57.

to put Lazarus to death as well, since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and believing in Jesus.”⁵⁸⁶

The next day is now known as Palm Sunday with the triumphal entry to Jerusalem. There is no arrest here, as the Pharisees complain: “You see, you can do nothing. Look, the world has gone after him.”⁵⁸⁷

John records that Philip brings Greeks to see Jesus. Later, Jesus gathers the disciples for supper. Judas leaves after receiving a piece of bread. Jesus tells him: “Do quickly what you are going to do.” Only John records that: “Some thought that, because Judas had the common purse, Jesus was telling him, ‘Buy what we need for the festival,’ or, that he should give something to the poor.”⁵⁸⁸

John also is the only gospel writer who records subsequent actions of Judas with some detail. Judas brings a detachment both of soldiers and police to the garden. While not recording the kiss of betrayal, John joins the synoptics telling of the removal of the ear of the high priest’s servant. Only John names the offender as Peter.

Jesus is questioned by the high priest and then separately by Pilate.⁵⁸⁹ John stipulates that Pilate makes the explicit decision for Jesus case to be disposed of by the Jewish rather than Roman justice system: “Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law.”

The Jewish leaders present respond that they do not have the power to impose capital punishment. So Pilate re-assumes the case, asking Jesus: “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus’ answer again represents a shift from the temporal to the spiritual: “My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.”⁵⁹⁰

More than the synoptics, John provides an extensive version of the on-going interplay between those who wanted Jesus killed, his own vacillation and Jesus. Pilate is told that Jesus should die because he claims to be the *Son of God* – not because of any political threat. John writes:

Now when Pilate heard this, he was more afraid than ever. He entered his headquarters again and asked Jesus, ‘Where are you from?’ But Jesus gave him no answer. Pilate therefore said to him, ‘Do you refuse to speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?’ Jesus answered him, ‘You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater

⁵⁸⁶ John 12:10-11.

⁵⁸⁷ John 12:19.

⁵⁸⁸ John 13:27,29.

⁵⁸⁹ John is the only gospel writer not to record a trial before the Jewish Sanhedrin.

⁵⁹⁰ John 18:33-36.

sin.’ From then on Pilate tried to release him, but the Jews cried out, ‘If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be king sets himself against the emperor.’⁵⁹¹

After his death, John indicates that not only Joseph of Arimathea, but Nicodemus assisted in the burial. John notes that Joseph “...was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews.”⁵⁹²

James & Paul: James sheds little light on his views of Jesus, his brother. However, his one direct reference centers on the question of elitism in the church: “My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ?”⁵⁹³ James goes on to castigate those who favor the rich over the poor, indicating that: “...if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.”⁵⁹⁴

Like James, Paul says relatively little to indicate whether he views Jesus as a social revolutionary. However, the life and teachings of Paul the apostle are certainly full of conflict with various forms of outside authority -- Christian, Jewish and Roman. He is first introduced as Saul in the Acts of the Apostles, as the recipient of the coats of those who stoned Stephen. The author of Acts explicitly notes: “And Saul approved of their killing him.”⁵⁹⁵

After Saul converts (and becomes known as Paul), he comes into severe conflict with leaders of the Jerusalem church over issues of whether Gentile converts to Christianity were bound by Jewish tradition -- notably circumcision. The intensity of the conflict is evident in later writings of Paul. To the Galatians, for example, Paul writes of Peter: “...I opposed him to his face, because he stood self-condemned.”⁵⁹⁶

Paul also aroused intense opposition from the leaders of Jewish communities outside Palestine. The first instance recorded in Acts occurs at a synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia. The author of Acts writes that Jews contradicted what was spoken by Paul. It is at this point that Paul and Barnabas first announce their intent to turn toward a primarily Gentile ministry: “It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you (a Jewish audience). Since you reject it and judge yourselves to be unworthy of eternal life, we are now turning to the Gentiles.”⁵⁹⁷

⁵⁹¹ John 19:8-12.

⁵⁹² John 19:38.

⁵⁹³ James 2:1.

⁵⁹⁴ James 2:9-10.

⁵⁹⁵ Acts 8:1.

⁵⁹⁶ Galatians 2:11.

⁵⁹⁷ Acts 13:46.

Not surprisingly, Paul inevitably also comes into conflict with the Roman imperial government.. The first indication of trouble covered in Acts occurs at Ephesus, as silversmiths and other artisans complain that Paul's success at attracting converts to Christianity is hurting the business (of making and selling images of gods -- centered on the temple of the Greek goddess Artemus).⁵⁹⁸

As with Jesus, the force of Roman justice comes to bear on Paul at the instigation of Jews (from Asia) in Jerusalem. Seizing Paul in the temple, they proclaim: "Fellow Israelites, help! This is the man who is teaching everyone everywhere against our people, our law, and this place; more than that, he has actually brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place."⁵⁹⁹ In the uproar that ensues, the Roman tribune intervenes, arresting Paul and, in the process, saving his life.

Thus begins a long process before both Jewish and Roman authorities leading to Paul's eventual appeal to the emperor and journey to Rome (as a Roman citizen). Acts concludes and all of Paul's letters are written prior to the final disposition of this case.

While Paul clearly presented difficult political issues for all types of authority, there is little in his ministry suggesting Paul's views on the subject of Jesus as revolutionary. Writing to the Romans, Paul makes it clear that he views himself to be "...a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to boast of my work for God. ... Thus I make it my ambition to proclaim the good news, not where Christ has already been named, so that I do not build on someone else's foundation...."⁶⁰⁰

Paul does make it clear that afflictions are to be expected in the service of Jesus the Christ. To the Corinthians, he writes:

For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ. If we are being afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation; if we are being consoled, it is for your consolation, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we also our suffering. Our hope for you is unshaken; for we know that as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our consolation.⁶⁰¹

And, as previously noted, Paul writes to the Galatians regarding another type of conflict -- that within the church. However, the political and social reality of this conflict is as important (if not more important) than the adversities caused by civil authority. In his opening remarks to the Galatians, Paul writes:

⁵⁹⁸ The temple to Artemis in Ephesus was on of the seven wonders of the world during this period of antiquity.

⁵⁹⁹ Acts 21:28.

⁶⁰⁰ Romans 15:16-20.

⁶⁰¹ II Corinthians 1:5-7.

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel -- not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are confusing you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.⁶⁰²

Non-Canonical Gospels: If notions of Jesus as a social revolutionary are difficult to ascertain within the canon, they are even more subtly expressed in what is available of the non-canonical gospels. In the Gospel of Thomas, Jesus is recorded as saying: “I have cast fire upon the world, and look, I’m guarding it until it blazes.”⁶⁰³ From this text, it is unclear if Jesus is speaking of events today or apocalyptically, of the temporal or the spiritual.

As is true of the gospels, the Jesus of Thomas acknowledges his unpopularity at home: “No prophet is welcome on his home turf; doctor don’t cure those who know them.”⁶⁰⁴

Jesus is similarly critical of the Jewish establishment: “The Pharisees and the scholars have taken the keys of knowledge and have hidden them. They have not entered, nor have they allowed those who want to enter to do so.”⁶⁰⁵

Even more vehemently, Thomas quotes Jesus as saying: “Damn the Pharisees! They are like a dog sleeping in the cattle manger: the dog neither eats nor [lets] the cattle eat.”⁶⁰⁶

And Thomas has a unique answer to the question of paying taxes: “Give the emperor what belongs to the emperor, give God what belongs to God, and give me what is mine.”⁶⁰⁷

The Infancy Gospel of Thomas is interesting for one of the few positive comments that the Pharisees and scholars report of Jesus – albeit when Jesus is a youth. The last chapter of this non-canonical gospel tells the story (also found in Luke) of Jesus teaching in the temple as a youth of twelve. As in Luke, his parents start their journey home, then return to Jerusalem when they realize Jesus is not with them. Mary finds Jesus in the temple, which prompts this interchange:

“Then the scholars and the Pharisees said, ‘Are you the mother of this child?’ She said, ‘I am.’ And they said to her, ‘You more than any woman are to be congratulated, for God has blessed the fruit of your womb! For we’ve never seen nor heard such glory and such virtue and such wisdom.’”⁶⁰⁸

⁶⁰² Galatians 1:6-7.

⁶⁰³ Thomas 10.

⁶⁰⁴ Thomas 31.

⁶⁰⁵ Thomas 39:1-2. Jesus then goes on to suggest: “As for you, be as sly as snakes and as simple as doves.” (Thomas 39:3)

⁶⁰⁶ Thomas 102.

⁶⁰⁷ Thomas 100:2-4.

⁶⁰⁸ Infancy Thomas 19:8-10.

The Gospel of Peter deals with the events surrounding the crucifixion of Jesus. It opens with a scene between the Judeans, Herod, Pilate and Joseph of Arimathea:

“...but of the Judeans no one washed his hands, neither Herod nor any one of his judges. Since they were [un]willing to wash, Pilate stood up. Then Herod the king orders the Lord to be [taken away], saying to them ‘Do what I commanded you to do to him.’ ”

Joseph, stood there, the friend of Pilate and the Lord, and when he realized that they were about to crucify him, he went to Pilate and asked for the body of the Lord for burial. And Pilate sent to Herod and asked for his body. And Herod replied, ‘Brother Pilate, even if no one had asked for him, we would have buried him, since the Sabbath is drawing near.’ ”⁶⁰⁹

This source also indicates that there was some regret by the some members of the leadership over what they had done, but only after the crucifixion was complete: “Then the Judeans and the elders and the priests perceived what evil they had done to themselves, and began to beat their breasts and cry out ‘Our sins have brought woes upon us! The judgment and the end of Jerusalem are at hand.’ ”⁶¹⁰

This sense of regret is not shared by all who were involved: “When the scholars and the Pharisees and the priests had gathered together, and when they heard that all the people were moaning and beating their breasts ... they became frightened and went to Pilate and begged him, ‘Give us soldiers so that <we> may guard his tomb for three [days], in case his disciples come and steal his body and the people assume that he is risen from the dead and do us harm.’ ”⁶¹¹

The intrigue continues after the resurrection. Those in the centurion’s company who see the event leave the tomb and rush to Pilate to report what has happened: “Pilate responded by saying, ‘I am clean of the blood of the son of God; this was all your doing.’ Then they all crowded around <Pilate> and began to beg and urge him to order the centurion and his soldiers to tell no one what they say. ‘You see,’ they said, ‘it is better for us to be guilty of the greatest sin before God than to fall into the hands of the Judean people and be stoned.’ Pilate then ordered the centurion and the soldiers to say nothing.”⁶¹²

The Egerton Gospel records a passage similar to that of the gospel of John, wherein Jesus tells the legal experts that the “one accusing you is Moses -- the one you thought you could trust.”⁶¹³ As in John, Jesus slips away from an attempted arrest.

⁶⁰⁹ Gospel of Peter 1:1-2 & 2:1-3.

⁶¹⁰ Peter 7:1.

⁶¹¹ Peter 8:1-3.

⁶¹² Peter 12:4-7.

⁶¹³ Egerton 1:3.

The Gospel of the Ebionites has Jesus make probably the most direct statement (of either canonical or non-canonical gospels) about the value of the Jewish tradition of animal sacrifices: “I came to do away with sacrifices, and if you don’t stop sacrificing, you won’t stop experiencing wrath.”⁶¹⁴

And the Gospel of the Nazoreans contains a variation on the synoptic traditions of the rich man who asks: “Teacher, what good do I have to do to live?” Jesus gives the response recorded in the synoptics:

But the rich man didn’t want to hear this and began to scratch his head. And the Lord said to him, ‘How can you say that you follow the Law and the Prophets? In the Law it says: ‘Love you neighbor as yourself.’ Look around you: many of your brothers and sisters, sons and daughters of Abraham, are living in filth and dying of hunger. Your house is full of good things and not a thing of yours manages to get out to them.’⁶¹⁵

And finally, there is an interesting variation to a passage from Luke found in one early manuscript: “That day he (Jesus) saw someone working on the Sabbath and said to him, ‘Mister, if you know what you’re doing, you are to be congratulated, but if you don’t, to hell with you; you are <nothing but> a lawbreaker.’”⁶¹⁶

Social Revolution in Summary: Jesus is portrayed by modern liberation theology as a social revolutionary. However, substantial support for this position can only be found in one New Testament gospel – Luke. This is the gospel focused on the “justice of God” – the needs of the poor and underprivileged. This is also the only gospel where Jesus responds to the question “Who is my neighbor?” with the parable of the Good Samaritan.

In sharp contrast, John’s gospel takes the opposite tack. With John, Jesus exhibits minimal interest in contemporary social or political issues. The trip is primarily spiritual. With John’s gospel, the Pharisees are somewhat divided in their opposition to Jesus. John also makes clear his belief that it is Jewish rather than Roman authorities who asks for the crucifixion of Jesus.

The other accounts – in and out of the New Testament canon – fall between the extremes of Luke and John. Matthew and Mark make it clear that followers of Jesus can expect to experience persecution – but there is substantially less emphasis on issues of social justice. Both are critical of Jewish authorities – Matthew of the Pharisees and Mark the scribes.

⁶¹⁴ Ebionites 6.

⁶¹⁵ Nazoreans 6:3-4.

⁶¹⁶ From a replacement verse for Luke 6:5 from what is generally viewed as an important manuscript, Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis. The canonical version of Luke 6:5 (NRSV) reads: “Then he said to them, ‘The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.’”

James echoes Luke's concern for the poor – but the concern is with fair treatment by other believers rather than redressing broader social ills. Like Matthew and Mark, Paul expects and receives persecution – for himself and for other believers.

The non-canonical gospels provide a wide range of perspectives. Thomas is critical of both Pharisees and scholars. Like John, the Gospel of Peter notes division within the Jewish leadership over unfair treatment of Jesus at the hands of the authorities. The Gospel of the Nazoreans echoes themes of Luke to help those in need.

Was Jesus a social revolutionary? It depends – on your choice of gospel.

22. Torah Law

In the Old Testament, the most common definition given of law is the term “torah,” which is also defined as a direction or teaching. In the New Testament (which is the subject of this discussion), the primary Greek term used is *nomos*, which means a law, ordinance or custom. However, the context makes clear that the meaning is generally the same as the Hebrew torah.

Gospel Accounts: Of the four gospel writers, Matthew refers repeatedly to the “law and the prophets.” These were two of the three major divisions of the Jewish scriptures, the third division being the psalms.

One of the most telling illustrations of Jesus' mixed views regarding adherence to Torah law comes in his response to the question of the Pharisees: “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause?” Jesus responds:

“Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate.”⁶¹⁷

The Pharisees press ahead with another question: “Why then did Moses command us to give a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her?” Now Jesus drives the point home:

“It was because you were so hard-hearted that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another commits adultery.”⁶¹⁸

After the crucifixion of Jesus, Matthew gives an interesting interpretation of the importance to the chief priests in maintaining the law. Judas is remorseful for having betrayed Jesus and returns the thirty pieces of silver. The chief priests hesitate about

⁶¹⁷ Matthew 19:3-6.

⁶¹⁸ Matthew 19:7-9.

accepting, saying: “It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since they are blood money.”⁶¹⁹ So rather than deposit the money directly, they use it to buy a potter’s field as a place to bury foreigners.

Matthew makes it clear that this subterfuge carried little weight with the general public. He comments that the field “...has been called the Field of Blood to this day.”⁶²⁰

The gospel of Mark never refers directly to the law, but does carry several references to lawfulness. All of Mark’s references are also found in Matthew.

The first reference to the law in Luke’s gospel comes at the time of Jesus’ circumcision, when he was but eight days old. The text indicates that he was brought to Jerusalem for purification “according to the law of Moses...”⁶²¹ Jesus is then blessed by Simeon and Anna. Luke then writes that: “When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth.”⁶²²

The concept of grace replacing law is introduced in the preface to John’s gospel: “The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”⁶²³

Also in John, Pontius Pilate attempts to cite Jewish law as a reason not to place Jesus under Roman law. He asks: “Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law.”⁶²⁴ Later in the proceedings, the Jews present tell Pilate: “We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God.”⁶²⁵

The Gospel’s View of Torah Law

| Topic | Jesus View of Torah Law |
|--|--|
| Matthew: | |
| Fulfilling the Law | “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.” (5:17-18) |
| Golden Rule & The Law | “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.” (7:12) |
| Passing from the Law | “For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John came; and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come.” (11:13-14) |
| Breaking the Law (by plucking grain on the | “Have you not read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which |

⁶¹⁹ Matthew 27:6.

⁶²⁰ Matthew 27:8. In verses 9-10, Matthew goes on to indicate that this action of the Pharisees is a fulfillment of prophecy, perhaps incorrectly ascribed to Jeremiah. The actual text may be more similar to Zechariah 11:13 than to Jeremiah, though Jeremiah did purchase land and visited a potter.

⁶²¹ Luke 2:22.

⁶²² Luke 2:39.

⁶²³ John 1:17.

⁶²⁴ John 18:31. The Jews there respond that they are not permitted to put anyone to death.

⁶²⁵ John 19:7.

| Topic | Jesus View of Torah Law |
|---|---|
| Sabbath) | it was not lawful for him or his companions to eat, but only for the priests. Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and yet are guiltless?" (12:3-5) ⁶²⁶ |
| Healing on the Sabbath | ".. it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." (12:12) |
| Lawfulness of Divorce | "...what God has joined together, let no one separate." (19:6) |
| Paying Taxes to the Emperor | "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." (20:21) |
| The Greatest Commandment in the Law | "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mine. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments rest all the law and the prophets." (22:37-40) |
| Neglecting the Important Matters of Law | "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practiced without neglecting the others, You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel!" (23:23-24) |
| Mark: | |
| Breaking the Law (by plucking grain on the Sabbath) | "The Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath; so the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath." (2:27) |
| Healing on the Sabbath | "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life or to kill? (3:4) |
| Lawfulness of Divorce | "Because of your hardness of heart he (Moses) wrote this commandment for you. But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' ... Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate." (10:5-9) |
| Lawfulness of Paying Taxes | "Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." (12:17) |
| Luke: | |
| Breaking the Law (by plucking grain on the Sabbath) | "The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath." (6:5) |
| Healing on the Sabbath | "I ask you, is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life or to destroy it?" (6:9) |
| Inheriting Eternal Life | To the teacher who asks, Jesus says: "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" (10:26) |
| More Healing on the Sabbath | "Is it lawful to cure people on the Sabbath, or not?" (14:3) ⁶²⁷ |
| Passing from the Law? | "The law and the prophets were in effect until John came; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is proclaimed, and everyone tries to enter it by force. But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away, than for one stroke of a letter in the law to be dropped." (16:16-17) |
| Lawfulness of Paying Taxes | "...give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to god the things that are God's." (20:25) |
| Appearance After Resurrection | "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets and the psalms |

⁶²⁶ Priests break the Sabbath by performing their duties on that day.

⁶²⁷ Luke records that there was no response to the question that Jesus poses to the Pharisees and lawyers. So Jesus takes the man with dropsy and heals him. He then follows with the parable of the child or ox that falls into a well.

| Topic | Jesus View of Torah Law |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| | must be fulfilled.”(24:44) |
| John: | |
| To a Crowd in Jerusalem | “Did not Moses give you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why are you looking for an opportunity to kill me?” (7:19) |
| Law & Justice | “Our law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing to find out what they are doing, does it?” (7:51) |
| Law Commanding Stoning for Adultery | “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone...” (8:7) |
| Law & Testimony | “In your law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is valid. I testify on my own behalf, and the Father who sent me testifies on my behalf.” (7:17-18) |
| The Law and Blasphemy | “Is it not written in your law, ‘I said, you are gods’? If those to whom the word of God came were called ‘gods’ – and the scripture cannot be annulled – can you say that the one whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world is blaspheming because I said, ‘I am God’s Son.’?” (10:34-36) |
| The Law & Messiah Remaining Forever | “The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light...” (12:35) |
| The Law & Hate | “It was to fulfill the word that is written in their law, ‘They hated me without a cause.’ ” (15:25) |

In short, all four New Testament gospels clearly provide indications of Jesus’ views of Torah law. Only Matthew, however, places emphasis on continued priority of the law. Only in Matthew does Jesus say that he has come “not to abolish but to fulfill” the law. Luke also appears to hang to the law, but more tenuously.

James & Paul: As leader of the Jerusalem church, James reflects a more traditional Jewish approach to upholding Torah law. But even with James, there are some surprises. James’ first reference is to: “...those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act -- they will be blessed in their doing.”⁶²⁸

Like Jesus and Paul, James boils it down to the great commandment: “You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ ” James goes on to note: “For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it”⁶²⁹

Finally, despite his emphasis on good works, James does not suggest that the law gives license to judge the actions of lawbreakers:

Whoever speaks evil against another or judges another, speaks evil against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is one lawgiver and judge who is able to save and to destroy. So who, then, are you to judge your neighbor?⁶³⁰

⁶²⁸ James 1:25.

⁶²⁹ James 2:8,10.

⁶³⁰ James 4:11-12.

The apostle Paul has a fair amount to say about Torah law – mostly in the negative. The KJV has 67 references in just the book of Romans to Torah law. Paul introduces his discourse on the law by noting that God “show no partiality” between Jew and Greek. His initial appeal to a higher sense of natural law unfolds this way:

All who have sinned apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous in God’s sight, but the doers of the law who will be justified. When Gentiles, who do not possess the law, do instinctively what the law requires, these, though not having the law, are a law to themselves. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, to which their own conscience also bears witness; and their conflicting thoughts will accuse or perhaps excuse them on the day when, according to my gospel, Go, through Jesus Christ, will judge the secret thoughts of all.⁶³¹

With this introduction, Paul launches into his main argument -- the futility of the Jewish custom of circumcision. He declares that: “...a person is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart – it is spiritual and not literal. Such a person receives praise not from others but from God.”⁶³²

Paul concludes the argument suggesting that the law of faith is superior to the law of works: “For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law.”⁶³³ With this approach, Paul can claim that the law is not overthrown, but “we uphold the law” by faith.

Near the end of this epistle, Paul equates fulfillment of the law with the singular concept of love. He echoes the statement of Jesus to: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” He then comes full circle: “Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.”⁶³⁴

If Paul’s rationale to the Romans is labored, he comes right to the point in his letter to the Galatians: “...we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law.”⁶³⁵ Paul gets even more strident, referring to the “curse of the law.”

He offers an argument that the law was intended for a time, only prior to the advent of Christ: “Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so

⁶³¹ Romans 2:12-16.

⁶³² Romans 2:29.

⁶³³ Romans 3:28.

⁶³⁴ Romans 13:9-10.

⁶³⁵ Galatians 2:16.

that we might be justified by faith. but now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith..”⁶³⁶

To the Corinthians, Paul offers a unique admission. He plays to issues of law depending on the audience: “To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law) so that I might win those outside the law.”⁶³⁷

Paul does lean on the law to weigh in on the issue of participation by women in the church: “As in all the churches of the saints, women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says.”⁶³⁸

Paul’s final reference to this topic in this epistle to the Corinthians appears somewhat ambiguous at first glance. Speaking of death, Paul writes: “The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”⁶³⁹ The message, though, is less than ambiguous. The death of Christ trumps the law – as the power of sin.

Non-Canonical Gospels: One distinguishing feature of the non-canonical gospels is their relative lack of interest in issues of Torah law. For example, the Gospel of Thomas contains virtually no such references.

The Gospel of Peter provides an interesting account of Herod requesting the body of Jesus for burial before the Sabbath. He explains to the Roman procurator Pilate: “Brother Pilate, even if no one had asked for him, we would have buried him, since the Sabbath is drawing near. For it is written in the Law, ‘The sun must not set upon one who has been executed.’”⁶⁴⁰

The Gospel of the Nazoreans gives the now familiar story of the rich man who approaches Jesus with the question: “Teacher, what good do I have to do to live.?” The answer of Jesus, as recorded in this account, starts with Jesus saying: “Mister, follow the Law and the prophets.” Questioned again, Jesus responds: “go sell everything you own and give it away to the poor and then come follow me.”

This gospel suggests that the rich man did not want to hear this and so began to scratch his head. Jesus then continues: “How can you say that you follow the Law and the Prophets? In the Law it says: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ Look around you: many of your brothers and sisters, sons and daughters of Abraham, are living in filth and dying

⁶³⁶ Galatians 3:23-26.

⁶³⁷ I Corinthians 9:20-21.

⁶³⁸ I Corinthians 14:33-34.

⁶³⁹ I Corinthians 15:56-57.

⁶⁴⁰ Gospel of Peter 2:2-3.

of hunger. Your house is full of good things and not a thing of yours manages to get out to them.”⁶⁴¹

An excerpt from one early manuscript puts an interesting spin on a passage from Luke. The actions of Jesus are recounted in this manuscript as follows: “That day he saw someone working on the Sabbath and said to him, ‘Mister, if you know what you’re doing, you are to be congratulated, but if you don’t, to hell with you; you are nothing but a *lawbreaker*.’”⁶⁴² This passage seems to indicate breaking the law is ok – if it occurs intentionally.

Jesus & Torah Law in Summary: New Testament writings that are strongest in emphasizing adherence to Torah law are Matthew, Mark and James.

Paul and the non-canonical Gospel of Thomas tack the opposite tack. Paul suggests that the law is superceded, Thomas simply ignores the subject.

Of the other non-canonical gospels, the Gospels of Peter and the Nazoreans both suggest the importance of continuing to maintain observance of Torah law. And one fragment suggests just the opposite – as long as the law breaking is intentional rather than inadvertent.

23. Trinity

For more than 1-1/2 millenia, Christian faith and doctrine has been shaped by what we know as the Nicene Creed. This confessional statement of faith is organized around the concept of a triune God – a trinity:

I believe in one *God the Father* Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And I believe in one *Lord, Jesus Christ*, the only-begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages, God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God; *begotten, not made, of one substance with the Father*, by whom all things were made, who for us and for our salvation came down from heaven. And He became flesh by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary and was made man. He was also crucified for us, suffered under Pontius Pilate, and was buried. And on the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead. And of His kingdom there will be no end.

⁶⁴¹ Nazoreans 6:1-4.

⁶⁴² This saying is found after Luke 6:5 in the Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis. The SV translates what literally occurs as “you are accursed” to “hell with you.” The canonical version from Luke reads (as per the SV) as follows: “And he used to say to them, ‘The son of Adam lords it over the Sabbath day.’”

And I believe in the *Holy Spirit*, the Lord and Giver of life, *who proceeds from the Father and the Son*, who together with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, and who spoke through the prophets, and one holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. I confess one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. And I await the resurrection of the dead. And the life of the world to come. Amen.

The equality and interdependence of this three-in-one Godhead is carefully expressed by the credal formulation. Jesus Christ is the “only-begotten Son” of God, of “one substance” with God the Father. The Holy Spirit is defined as one “who proceeds from the Father and the Son.”

The Trinitarian formulation is widely viewed throughout Christendom as authoritative, but is it scriptural? At the Council of Nicaea, the theological battle was waged over the relationship of Father and Son. Was Jesus of the same substance, or similar substance or different substance than the Father?

For Judaism, the Nicene formulation amounts to idolatry – because it appears to contradict the Shema formulation that the “the Lord our God is one.”⁶⁴³ A similar conclusion is reached by Muhammed in the Qur’an: “Praise be to Allah, Who begets no son, and has no partner in (His) dominion; nor (needs) He any to protect Him from humiliation: yes, magnify him for His greatness and glory.”⁶⁴⁴

For some, Nicaea could even be interpreted as violating the first of the Ten Commandments: “Thou shalt have no other gods before me.”⁶⁴⁵ Small wonder that this tenet of Christianity has served to drive a wedge between Christian and Jewish brethren.

So, back to the question. Go back before Nicaea, back to the New Testament as we know it. Back to other early pre-3rd century non-canonical writings. What is the evidence for or against the concept of Trinity as we know it today?

Gospel Accounts: All four gospels have something to say on the relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit – some more, some less.

Starting with Matthew’s gospel, the identity of Spirit and God the Father is in evidence as Jesus tells his disciples that “...it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.”⁶⁴⁶

Jesus later quotes the prophet Isaiah, who speaking for the Father says: “Here is *my servant*, whom I have chosen, my beloved, with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put

⁶⁴³ Deuteronomy 6:4, KJV.

⁶⁴⁴ The Qur’an, 17.111.

⁶⁴⁵ Exodus 20:3, KJV.

⁶⁴⁶ Matthew 10:20.

my Spirit upon him...”⁶⁴⁷ Using this prophecy, there is a clear sense of divine infusion and identity both with God’s servant (i.e. Son) and spirit.

Lest there be any doubt as to Matthew’s intent, consider his version of the Great Commission. In his last earthly statement, Jesus commissions his disciples, saying:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the *Father* and of the *Son* and of the *Holy Spirit*, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.⁶⁴⁸

Clearly, for Matthew, there is a divine relationship involving three entities – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. However, Matthew is not as explicit in stating the nature of the relationship as is, say, the Nicene Creed. Are these entities of the same substance? Are they co-equal? Matthew’s gospel provides no clear illumination.

When other gospel writers are added to the mix, things get more confusing. For example, Mark notes that “Jesus perceived *in his spirit* that they were discussing these questions among themselves”⁶⁴⁹ Is Jesus referring to the Holy Spirit? Or to his own spirit within him – as flesh and (possibly) God? In fact, there are numerous occasions in this gospel where Jesus perceives an “unclean spirit” in others.

Nowhere does Mark provide a Trinitarian formulation as cohesive as that of Matthew. In fact, in his version of the Great Commission (before the ascension), Mark’s version does not even mention the roles of Father, Son and Spirit.⁶⁵⁰

Luke appears to fall somewhere in the middle between Matthew and Mark. There is a stronger linkage between Godhead and the Holy Spirit.

As an example, look to the time while Mary has yet to give birth to Jesus: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you...”⁶⁵¹,

This statement seems to clearly equate the Holy Spirit with the power of the Most High. However, the text does not directly say whether the Holy Spirit is in fact of the same substance as the Most High, or whether the Spirit is an expression (or emissary) of the power of God. However, later Jesus is described (after his temptation) as “filled with the power of the Spirit.”⁶⁵² This statement would appear to distinguish Jesus’ own spirit from the Spirit of the Most High.

⁶⁴⁷ Matthew 12:18.

⁶⁴⁸ Matthew 28:18-20.

⁶⁴⁹ Mark 2:8.

⁶⁵⁰ See Mark 15:16-18. Note that these verses (from 9-16) are not included with the earliest extant manuscripts of Mark.

⁶⁵¹ Luke 1:35.

⁶⁵² Luke 4:14.

Similarly, Jesus goes to a synagogue in his hometown Nazareth, declaring that he has been “filled with the power of the Spirit”⁶⁵³

Luke’s gospel perhaps comes closest to an early Trinitarian formulation – in a backhanded sort of a way:

At that same hour Jesus rejoiced *in the Holy Spirit* and said, “I thank you, *Father, Lord of heaven and earth*, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows who the *Son* is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”⁶⁵⁴

All three entities are here in one prayer, but again the linkage of unity and equality is not directly stated.

And at the point of his death, Luke attributes these final words to the Son: “*Father*, into your hands I commend *my spirit*.”⁶⁵⁵ In his final moments of agony, Jesus calls on God as his father. He then releases his spirit to God, though not necessarily the Holy Spirit.

Like Matthew, Luke’s gospel ends with a truncated form of a Great Commission – but with no Trinitarian elements. Rather, this formulation is left to the opening scene of Acts (assuming Luke wrote this account also).

In contrast, the verbiage of Acts is somewhat different than that of Matthew. However, the elements of Father, Spirit and Son are all there, as Jesus declares:

It is not for you to know the times or periods that the *Father* has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the *Holy Spirit* has come upon you; and you will be *my* witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.⁶⁵⁶

Luke places all three entities into one statement, uttered as his last reported words just prior to the climactic moment of his ascension to the clouds. In effect, Luke has offered tantalizing clues, but without sealing the identity of the Godhead.

The Gospel of John leads in a similar direction. This gospel begins with the well known: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and *the Word was God*. He was in the beginning with God.”⁶⁵⁷

⁶⁵³ Luke 4:18.

⁶⁵⁴ Luke 10:21-22.

⁶⁵⁵ Luke 23:46.

⁶⁵⁶ Acts 1:3.

⁶⁵⁷ John 1:1-2.

A few sentences later, John writes: “And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son.” Moments later, he concludes the soliloquy, noting: No one has ever seen God. It is *God the only Son*, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known.”⁶⁵⁸

The logic appears clear, Jesus (the son) = God (the father). But, wait a moment. Between the statement about the Word being God and God being the Son, we have something else.

Indeed, John seems to contradict his own logic, indicating that there is not necessarily any uniqueness to being a child of God. We all can become “children of God,” expressed by the additional passage in John 1 that “to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become *children of God*, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.”⁶⁵⁹

In this passage, humankind does not appear to be merely adopted, but of the direct spiritual lineage of God. How different is this from the role of Jesus, the “only begotten” son of God? John’s gospel never quite says.

For those who wonder about God and Spirit, it is John’s Jesus who says: “God *is* Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”⁶⁶⁰ In this instance God does not authorize a separate entity known as Spirit; rather, God is Spirit.

“But the Helper, the *Holy Spirit*, whom the Father will send in My name”⁶⁶¹ In this later instance, John’s Jesus seems to communicate an opposing thought. The Spirit is not part of the Father, but is subject to the Father as one whom the Father can dispatch. Later, John’s Jesus speaks of “the *Spirit of truth who proceeds* from the Father...”⁶⁶² This language of the Spirit *proceeding* from the Father would centuries later be incorporated within the Nicene Creed.

Back to the first century, Jesus is speaking of himself, saying: “All things that the Father has are Mine.”⁶⁶³ And more directly, John’s Jesus states simply: “The Father and I are one.”⁶⁶⁴

So, while John provides clues that could be construed as a possible Trinitarian relationship, the entire formulation is not spelled out.⁶⁶⁵ The strands are there:

⁶⁵⁸ John 1:14-18.

⁶⁵⁹ John 1:12-13.

⁶⁶⁰ John 4:24.

⁶⁶¹ John 14:26.

⁶⁶² John 15:26

⁶⁶³ John 16:15.

⁶⁶⁴ John 10:24.

⁶⁶⁵ Unlike Matthew, John’s Jesus does not invoke a Great Commission and so no ending reference to an holy Trinity.

- God = Spirit
- Father = Son

So, is the conclusion to be: God = Father = Son = Spirit? One could draw out this logic, yet John never explicitly so states. If this is the logic, could the full relationship be: God = Father = (Son = Other Human Children) = Spirit? This clearly can get messy, quickly.

Perhaps the strongest trinitarian formulation of the New Testament is not to be found in the gospels, but in the epistle of I John. The King James version states that "there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one."⁶⁶⁶ However, the oldest Greek manuscripts do not contain this trinitarian addition. Newer translations such as the New Revised Standard Version which simply drop the trinitarian reference of three as one entirely.

At the end of four gospels, we are left with a condundrum. Matthew gets us closest (but not all the way) to the Trinitarian formulation of the Nicene Creed, Mark gets us not very far at all, and Luke and John get us perhaps half-way. John makes perhaps the most explicit statements of Jesus' oneness with the Father, but complicates the issue by saying we are all children of God. None of this is very satisfying to bolster a creed at the center of Christian belief and doctrine.

Paul & James: Do Paul and James get us any nearer the nexus of Father, Son and Spirit? Well, yes and no.

Paul provides a number of discourses which offering clues as to the possible nature of this triune relationship – exemplified by this passage from Romans (worth recounting in its entirety):

For *God* has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his *own Son* in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the *Spirit*. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the *Spirit* set their minds on the things of the *Spirit*. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the *Spirit* is life and peace. For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law—indeed it cannot, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the *Spirit of God* dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the *Spirit of Christ* does not belong to him. But if *Christ* is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the *Spirit of him who raised Jesus* from the dead dwells in you, he who raised *Christ* from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his *Spirit* that dwells in you.

⁶⁶⁶ I John 5:7, KJV.

So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the *Spirit* you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the *Spirit of God* are children of *God*. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “*Abba! Father!*” it is that very *Spirit* bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of *God*, and if children, then heirs, heirs of *God* and joint heirs with *Christ*—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.⁶⁶⁷

Clearly, for Paul the relationship is tightknit – but perhaps also a bit confusing. Consider all the terms given for possible members of the God-head:

- God
- (God’s) own Son
- Spirit
- Spirit of God
- Spirit of Christ
- Christ
- Spirit of him who raised Jesus
- Abba, Father

Going a step further, one could even note the reference that Jesus gives to the rest of us as “children of God”. Does that provide any similar claim for humankind to divinity?

In his first epistle to the Corinthians, Paul writes that: “...you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the *Lord Jesus Christ* and in *the Spirit of our God*.”⁶⁶⁸ And in the second epistle, Paul puts it this way, stating that: “...it is God who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us, by putting his seal on us and giving us his Spirit in our hearts as a first installment.”⁶⁶⁹

Yet, Paul can also provide distinctions, for example saying that it is God “who has given us the Spirit...”⁶⁷⁰ His closing comments represent a clear albeit as yet primitive Trinitarian formulation: ¹³“The *grace of the Lord Jesus Christ*, the *love of God*, and the *communion of the Holy Spirit* be with all of you.”⁶⁷¹

To the Galatians, Paul articulates a theme that would later be picked up by the Nicene Creed:

⁶⁶⁷ Romans 8:3-17.

⁶⁶⁸ I Corinthians 6:11.

⁶⁶⁹ II Corinthians 1:21-22.

⁶⁷⁰ II Corinthians 5:5.

⁶⁷¹ II Corinthians 13:13.

And because you are children, *God* has sent the *Spirit of his Son* into our hearts, crying, “*Abba! Father!*”⁷ So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through *God*.⁶⁷²

As with his letter to the Romans, Paul employs a formulation involving God, Spirit and Son. The wording related to God’s sending the Spirit is reminiscent of that of John’s gospel.

However, once again, the boundaries are blurred. The Spirit is not simply the Holy Spirit, but the “Spirit of his Son.” Once again, the purpose of this draw to the divine is for us to call “Abba Father.” But who is this Abba? God only, or the God-head?

And once again, we as humans are part of the equation, no longer as slaves to the God-head, but as joint heirs.

Finally, to the Thessalonians, Paul writes this bit of practical advice:

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of *God in Christ Jesus* for you. Do not quench the *Spirit*.⁶⁷³

For this apostle Paul, all three entities are important. The interrelationships are inextricably intertwined:

- God in Christ
- The Spirit in *or* of Christ
- The Spirit of Christ

Yet, for Paul there is also a clear sense of divine hierarchy. God the Father is preeminent. From God comes the authority of the Son and the Spirit. Are they of the same or similar substance? Well, this is a question Paul never really answers.

In sharp contrast with Paul, the short epistle of *James* offers little discussion and provides virtually no insight into the concept of a divine Trinity. The “Lord Jesus Christ” is mentioned twice. The term “spirit” is mentioned twice, both times in the *lower case*, referring to the human rather than a divine spirit.⁶⁷⁴

God (the Father) receives consistent mention throughout James epistle, only once in conjunction with another of the Godhead. At the beginning of his epistle, James opens with the line: “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.”⁶⁷⁵

⁶⁷² Galatians 4:6-7.

⁶⁷³ I Thessalonians 5:16-19.

⁶⁷⁴ See James 2:26 and 4:5.

⁶⁷⁵ James 1:1

In short, all three personages appear in James but they are never clearly linked to each other. In fact, James appears to head in a different direction, referring to the Old Testament Shema with the observation that “God is one.”⁶⁷⁶ Consistent with his anchor in Judaism, James identifies with Father, Son, Spirit but never equates them as *three in one*.

Non-Canonical Gospels:

Thomas refers consistently to the “Father’s imperial domain” throughout his sayings. And his book is replete with sayings from Jesus (114 of them). He refers to “children of the living Father.”⁶⁷⁷

In an interesting counterpoint to the Great Commission of three canonical gospels, Thomas quotes the disciples as asking who is to be their leader after Jesus leaves. Rather than point to the coming ministry of the Holy Spirit, Thomas takes a more pragmatic approach quoting Jesus as saying: “No matter where you are, you are going to James the Just, for whose sake heaven and earth came into being.”⁶⁷⁸

However, Thomas also quotes Jesus as saying something to the effect that: “Where there are *three deities, they are divine*. Where there are two or one, I am with that one.”⁶⁷⁹

Thomas also does appear to veer toward a Trinitarian formulation. In a passage that parallels the three synoptics, Jesus says: “Whoever blasphemes against the Father will be forgiven, and whoever blasphemes against the son will be forgiven, but whoever blasphemes against the holy spirit will not be forgiven, either on earth or in heaven.”⁶⁸⁰

The Secret Book of James provides an intriguing twist on the possible hierarchy of the God-head. Speaking ostensibly to James, the Lord (Jesus) says:

I swear to you, none will be saved who are afraid of death; for (God’s) domain belongs to those who are dead. Become better than I; be like the *son of the holy spirit*.⁶⁸¹

This reference could be read to suggest that Jesus is not only son of the Father, but of the Holy Spirit.

The Gospel of the Hebrews is a collection of references to what appears to be a single Jewish-Christian gospel from various early Christian authors. This gospel is intriguing

⁶⁷⁶ The full text of James 2:19 is “You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder.” James draws this pivotal OT text to drive home to his Jewish readers the supremacy of works over faith.

⁶⁷⁷ Gospel of Thomas 2:4

⁶⁷⁸ Thomas 12:2.

⁶⁷⁹ Thomas 30:1-2. Unfortunately, the Coptic and Greek versions of this text differ, leaving this saying all the more obscure.

⁶⁸⁰ Thomas 44:1-3.

⁶⁸¹ Secret Book of James 5:5-6.

because of its multiple comments regarding the Holy Spirit – indicated with attribution to the author who ostensibly quoted from this work.

In the 4th-5th century, Jerome stated that:

In the Hebrew gospel that the Nazarenes read it says: “The whole fountain of the *holy spirit* comes down on him. For the Lord is the spirit and where the spirit is, there is freedom.”

Later on, in the same gospel, we find the following: “And it happened that when the *Lord* came up out of the water, the *whole fountain of the holy spirit* came down on him and rested on him. It said to him. ‘*My son*, I was waiting for you in all the prophets, waiting for you to come so I could rest in you. For you are my rest; you are my *first-begotten Son* who rules forever.’”

A century or so earlier, the great theologian Origen provided another even more intriguing snippet in his Commentary on II John:

Those who give credence to the Gospel of the Hebrews, in which the Savior says, “Just now *my mother, the holy spirit*, took me by one of my hairs and brought me to Tabor, the great mountain,” have to face the problem of explaining how it is possible for the ‘mother’ of Christ to be the holy spirit which came into existence through the Logos. But those things are not difficult to explain. For if ‘whoever does the will of the heavenly father is his brother and sister and mother,’ and if the name ‘brother of Christ’ applies not only to humans, but also to beings of a more divine rank, there is nothing absurd in the holy spirit being his mother, when anyone who does the will of the heavenly father is called the ‘mother of Christ.’

Both quotations by Jerome and Origen indicate that Jesus is a Son of the Holy Spirit. Origen’s quotation also suggests that the Spirit is a woman, the mother of the Son. Origen then seeks to explain this passage from the Gospel of the Hebrews away, suggesting that the meaning is figurative rather than literal.

Like Origen, Jerome comments elsewhere in his writings on this unusual passage regarding the “my mother, the holy spirit.” In a commentary on Micah, Jerome says that this phrase should lead one “to say that the word of God proceeds from the spirit, and that the soul, which is the bride of the word, has the holy spirit (which in Hebrew is feminine in gender, RUA) as a mother-in-law.”

And in a commentary on Isaiah, Jerome again comments on this passage from the Gospel of the Hebrews, suggesting that “...no one should be offended by this (reference to spirit as mother), because “spirit” in Hebrew is feminine, while in our language (Latin) it is masculine and in Greek it is neuter.” In divinity, there is no gender. In other words, for Jerome (like Origen), the gender of the Spirit is a matter of semantics which lead nowhere – effectively neutered.

But even Jerome has a softer moment. In yet another commentary (this time on Ezekiel), Jerome writes:

In the Book of Judges we read ‘Deborah’ which means ‘bee.’ Her prophecies are the sweetest honey and refer to the holy spirit, who is called in the Hebrew by a feminine noun. In the Gospel of the Hebrews that the Nazarenes read, the Savior indicates this by saying, “Just now my mother, the holy spirit, whisked me away.”⁶⁸²

Spirit as Sophia: There is another tradition generally outside of the OT/NT canon that bears on this discussion – the tradition of the Sophia (or Wisdom). The Sophia of Jesus Christ is part of the Nag Hammadi Library. This gnostic text describes the “Great Sophia” as the consort of the “Self-constructed Father.”

The disciple Bartholomew asks: “How (is it that) (he) was designated in the Gospel ‘Man’ and ‘Son of Man’? To which of them, then is this son Related?” To this the Holy One answers:

I want you to know that First Man is called Begetter, Self-perfected Mind. He reflected with Great Sophia, his consort, and revealed his first-begotten, androgynous son. His male name is designated ‘First Begetter Son of God’; his female name, ‘First Begettress Sophia, Mother of the Universe.’ Some call here ‘Love.’ Now First-begotten is called ‘Christ.’ Since he has authority from his father, he created a multitude of angels without number for retinue from Spirit and Light.⁶⁸³

Trinity in Summary: At the end of this survey, we are left with a condundrum. Of the four gospels, Matthew gets us closest to the Trinitarian formulation of the Nicene Creed, Mark gets us not very far at all, and Luke and John get us perhaps half-way. Like John, the apostle Paul provides for all sorts of linkages between Father, Son and Holy Spirit – with God in Spirit and Son, the Spirit in the Son and even the Son in the Spirit. Yet there is some sense of hierarchy – with the Father preeminent, from whom both Son and Spirit emanate.

The epistle of James reverts to the traditional Jewish Shema of “God is one.” Of the non-canonical gospels, Thomas recognizes three deities; Secret James refers to the Son of the Holy Spirit. Both the early church theologians Origen and Jerome cite the now missing Gospel of the Hebrews as calling the Savior’s mother the Holy Spirit. Jerome (but not Origen) dismiss this as really a gender neutral statement.

⁶⁸² These excerpts are from the Gospel of the Hebrews 3-4, as provided in *The Complete Gospels*, Robert J. Miller, editor, Pleridge Press (San Francisco), 1992.

⁶⁸³ *The Nag Hammadi Library*, Revised Edition, James M. Robinson, General Editor, New York (Harper Collins), 1978.

What are we to make of all this? Clearly, the part of the Nicene Creed best supported by these ancients is the statement that the Holy Spirit “proceeds from” both Father and Son. However, with the possible exception of John’s recorded statement that “the Father and I are one,” there is little direct support for the Nicene assertion that Father and Son are of “one substance.”

Finally, we are left with the rather intriguing thought that the Holy Spirit may be of the feminine gender – a thought essentially expunged from the canonical writings. But then gender confusion engenders role confusion. Is the Christ the son of Father and Spirit? Or does the Spirit really proceed from Son as well as Father?

And so, the confusion remains – three in one, one in three, a distinct three, or all of the above?

24. Wisdom & Word

The concept of Jesus as a *teacher of wisdom* has been advanced in a variety of forms since early Christianity. By the second century, Gnostics emerged as the best known of those who ascribed teachings of wisdom knowable only to a select few.

In recent times, the concept has led to unusual variations, such as the *pescher* theories of Barbara Thierring. This is the idea that the New Testament contains hidden mysteries, knowable only to those who, in effect, break the code.

Key words that surround this topic are *wisdom* and *word*. Other affiliated terms include the words light, glory, knowledge and mystery.

Gospel Accounts: Of the four NT gospel writers, John is best known as a purveyor of Jesus as “the word,” derived from the Greek term *logos* (root of our English word logic or reason). John does not use the corollary term wisdom, taken from the Greek term *sophia*..

John’s gospel begins with the well known prologue:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.⁶⁸⁴

Later in this soliloquy, John writes: “And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.”⁶⁸⁵

⁶⁸⁴ John 1:1-5.

⁶⁸⁵ John 1:14.

The word next appears in John in an interesting context – written *in retrospect*: “After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this (talking of the temple of his body); and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.”⁶⁸⁶

John gives numerous accounts of people believing in his word. For example, of the Samaritans, John writes: “And many more believed because of his word.”⁶⁸⁷ Similarly, John says this of a royal official whose son is healed: “The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started on his way.”⁶⁸⁸

Jesus is quoted as saying: “Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life.”⁶⁸⁹ Later, Jesus says to the same crowd of Jews that: “...you do not have his word abiding in you, because you do not believe him whom he has sent.”⁶⁹⁰

To the Jews who had believed in him, Jesus says: “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”⁶⁹¹ He then begins to stir the pot by telling the same group: “I know that you are descendants of Abraham; yet you look for opportunity to kill me, because there is no place in you for my word. ... Why then do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot accept my word.”⁶⁹²

Later, a group takes up stones to throw at Jesus who answers: “Is it not written in you law, ‘I said, you are gods’? If those to whom the word of God came were called ‘gods’ -- and the scripture cannot be annulled – can you say that the one whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world is blaspheming because I said, ‘I am God’s Son’?”⁶⁹³

Jesus repeats an earlier theme of the word and judgment: “The one who rejects me and does not receive my word has a judge; on the last day the word that I have spoken will serve as judge.”⁶⁹⁴

Shortly before the crucifixion, Jesus begins to describe the place he is preparing for those who follow him. Judas (not Iscariot) asks a question implying some degree of secrecy to Jesus teachings: “Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and *not to the world*?” Jesus answers: “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Whoever does not love

⁶⁸⁶ John 2:22.

⁶⁸⁷ John 4:41.

⁶⁸⁸ John 4:50.

⁶⁸⁹ John 5:24.

⁶⁹⁰ John 5:38.

⁶⁹¹ John 8:31.

⁶⁹² John 8:37-43.

⁶⁹³ John 10:34-36.

⁶⁹⁴ John 12:48.

me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me.”⁶⁹⁵

Jesus goes on to describe himself as the “true vine” and notes: “You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you.” He goes on to say that: “If they persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also.” Moments later, he observes: “It was to fulfill the word that is written in their law, ‘They hated me without a cause.’”⁶⁹⁶

John’s final references to the word comes in Jesus’ final prayer at Gethsemane for his disciples:

I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word.(17:6)

I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. (17:14)

Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. (17:17)

I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, they may all be one.(17:20-21)

Interestingly, the three synoptics also make abundant use of the *logos* word, but often in a context more typical of our current English language usage. For example, the earliest usage of “word” in Matthew occurs when the Roman centurion tells Jesus: “Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only speak the word, and my servant will be healed.”⁶⁹⁷

However, the synoptics do use the *logos* term on a number of occasions in a way connoting a similar meaning as given by John:

Explaining the parable of the sower: “When anyone hears *the word* of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears *the word* and immediately receives it with joy; yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of *the word*, that person immediately falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears *the word*, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears *the word* and

⁶⁹⁵ John 14:22-24.

⁶⁹⁶ Quotations are from John 15:3,20,25.

⁶⁹⁷ Matthew 8:8.

understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty” (Matthew 13:19-23)

Future coming: “Heaven and earth will pass away, but *my words* will not pass away.” (24:35)

Jesus teaching and healing at Capernaum: “...and he was speaking *the word* to them.” (Mark 2:2)

Explaining the parable of the sower: “The sower sows *the word*...” (Mark 4:14-20, rest of passage parallels Matthew 13)⁶⁹⁸

A commentary by Mark: “With many such parables he spoke *the word* to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything *in private* to his disciples.” (4:33-34)

On Pharisees breaking the commandment to honor parents: “...thus making void *the word* of God through your tradition that you have handed on” (7:13)

To the crowd and his disciples: “Those who are ashamed of me and of *my words* in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his father with the holy angels.” (8:38)

Lesson of the fig tree: “Heaven and earth will pass away, but *my words* will not pass away.” (13:31)

On the disciples after Jesus ascension: “And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming *the word* with signs following. Amen.” (16:20, KJV)⁶⁹⁹

Introduction to Luke’s gospel: “Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eye-witnesses and servants of *the word*...” (Luke 1:1-2)

Luke introducing the calling of the disciples: “...while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear *the word* of God...” (5:1)

Explaining the parable of the sower: “Now the parable is this: the seed is *the word* of God...” (8:11-15, parallels accounts of the other two synoptics)

⁶⁹⁸ Before describing the parable of the sower, Jesus says to his 12 disciples: “To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables.” (Mark 4:11)

⁶⁹⁹ This ending of Mark, while in the canon, is now generally believed not to have been contained in the earliest currently available manuscripts of this gospel.

To the crowd: “My mother and my brothers are those who hear *the word* of God and do it.” (8:21)

“Those who are ashamed of me and of *my words*, of them the Son of Man will be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.” (9:26)

To the woman in the crowd: “Blessed rather are those who hear *the word* of God and obey it.” (11:28)

Lesson of the fig tree: “Heaven and earth will pass away, but *my words* will not pass away.” (21:33, parallels Mark)

As noted, the gospel of John does not make use of the term *wisdom* though its use of term *word* is taken by many to connote wisdom. The three synoptics make interesting references to wisdom:

After comparing himself (Jesus) with John the Baptist: “Yet *wisdom* is vindicated by her deeds.” (Matthew 11:19)⁷⁰⁰

Comparing himself to Solomon: “The queen of the south will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to listen to the *wisdom* of Solomon, and see, something greater than Solomon is here.” (12:42)

Astonishment at Jesus by hometown residents: “Where did this man get this *wisdom* and these deeds of power?” (13:54)

Astonishment at Jesus by hometown residents: “Where did this man get all this? What is this *wisdom* that has been given to him?” (Mark 6:2)

Jesus as a child: “The child grew and became strong, filled with *wisdom*; and the favor of God was upon him.” (Luke 2:40) Later: “And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.” (2:52)

After comparison with John the Baptist: “Nevertheless, *wisdom* is vindicated by all her children.” (7:35)⁷⁰¹

Comparing himself to Solomon: “The queen of the South will rise at the judgment with the people of this generation and condemn them, because she came from the ends of the earth to listen to the *wisdom* of Solomon, and see, something greater than Solomon is here.” (11:31)

⁷⁰⁰ This clearly from Matthew clearly gives a feminine context to Sophia, evoking similar passages written earlier by Solomon, such as: “Say to wisdom, ‘You are my sister’...” (Proverbs 7:4)

⁷⁰¹ As with a similar passage in Matthew, Luke clearly puts wisdom (Sophia) in the feminine.

Condemning the lawyers: “Therefore also the *Wisdom* of God said, ‘I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute, so that this generation may be charged with the blood of all the prophets shed since the foundation of the world, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, it will be charged against this generation. Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge; you did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering.’” (11:49-52)⁷⁰²

Advice regarding future persecutions: “So make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance; for I will give you words and a *wisdom* that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict.” (21:14-15)⁷⁰³

All three synoptics quote Jesus setting up a paradigm for keeping the crowds in suspense, while explaining *secrets* or *mysteries* only to the select few of his disciples. For example, after telling the parable of the sower, Jesus explains: “To you it has been given to know the secrets (literally mysteries) of the Kingdom of God; but to others I speak in parables.”⁷⁰⁴

James & Paul: James picks up on John’s theme of the word, with virtually no reference to the corollary concept of wisdom. Early in his letter, James admonishes:

Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls. But be doers of *the word*, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. For if any are hearers of *the word* and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for the look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like.⁷⁰⁵

In contrast with James, the apostle Paul makes liberal use of the themes of the wisdom and mystery as well as the word of God.

⁷⁰² The NRSV capitalizes use of the term wisdom in this instance. Commentaries to both the NRSV and NIV illustrate the ambiguity or mystery that surrounds this application of wisdom. The *NRSV Harper Collins Study Bible* notes that: “The Wisdom of God is closely identified with the Holy Spirit.” The *NIV Study Bible* indicates that this passage is: “Not a quotation from the OT or any other known book. It may refer to God speaking through Jesus, or it may be referring in quotation form to God’s decision to send prophets and apostles even though he knew they would be rejected.”

The NRSV refers to two passages in Acts as indicating a separation (or distinct entities) for the Holy Spirit and wisdom. In Acts 6:3, the disciples are selecting men to assist widows in the distribution of food: “Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task...” Acts 6:10 refers to critics of Stephen: “But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke.”

⁷⁰³ Note that the literal Greek for “words” is “a mouth”.

⁷⁰⁴ Luke 8:10. Similar quotations are at Matthew 13:11 and Mark 4:11.

⁷⁰⁵ James 1:21-25.

In Romans, Paul introduces all three concepts. He uses the concept of the word to illustrate that not all Israel will be saved: “It is not as though *the word* of God had failed. For not all Israelites truly belong to Israel. ... This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as descendants.”⁷⁰⁶

Paul reverses gears, suggesting all Israel will be saved via mercy, though disobedient. He begins by noting: “So that you may not claim to be wiser than you are, brothers and sisters, I want you to understand this *mystery*: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved.”⁷⁰⁷ Later in this passage, Paul exults: “O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!”⁷⁰⁸

To the Corinthians, Paul again posits both a thesis and later an antithesis. Early in his letter he rails against wisdom, at least that of human derivation: “For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent *wisdom*, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power.”⁷⁰⁹

Paul moves forward to introduce the “mystery of God” with the caveat that: “My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of *wisdom*, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.”⁷¹⁰

Having said this, Paul moves further, positing the antithesis:

Yet among the mature we do speak *wisdom*, though it is not a *wisdom* of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish. But we speak God’s *wisdom*, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. ... And we speak of these things in words not taught by human *wisdom* but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual. Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God’s Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. Those who are spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else’s scrutiny.⁷¹¹

Note Paul’s direct reference to the “secret and hidden” nature of wisdom.

⁷⁰⁶ Romans 9:6-9.

⁷⁰⁷ Romans 11:25.

⁷⁰⁸ Romans 11:33.

⁷⁰⁹ I Corinthians 1:17.

⁷¹⁰ I Corinthians 2:1-5.

⁷¹¹ I Corinthians 2:6-15.

Paul is more circumspect in his usage of the *word* similar to that of John's gospel. However, even this type of teaching finds its way into Paul's writing. At the conclusion of his letter to the Galatians, Paul says: "Those who are taught *the word* must share in all good things with their teacher."⁷¹²

And to the Philippians, Paul writes that: "...most of the brothers and sisters, having been made confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, dare to speak *the word* with greater boldness and without fear."⁷¹³

Other New Testament Accounts: The author of Acts continues the theme introduced by Luke further suggesting a mystery to wisdom. In choosing men to administer relief to widows, they select seven who are "full of the Spirit and *of wisdom*," almost suggesting the possibility of wisdom as an entity on a par with the Holy Spirit. In the same chapter, critics of Stephen are described as not being able to "withstand the *wisdom* and the Spirit with which he spoke."⁷¹⁴

Stephen's speech to the high priest suggests that, due to God's intervention, Joseph was able to: "...win favor and to show *wisdom* when he stood before Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who appointed him ruler over Egypt and over all his household." Stephen goes on to, paradoxically suggest a more human source of wisdom, stating that Moses was: "...instructed in all the *wisdom* of the Egyptians and was powerful in his words and deeds."⁷¹⁵

Non-Canonical Gospels: The Gospel of Thomas gives somewhat conflicting information regarding the word, or at least the extent to which it should be publicly accessible. A couple of passages clearly indicate the value of wide publication. For example: "A city built on a high hill and fortified cannot fall, nor can it be hidden."⁷¹⁶

This is followed with a passage similar to Matthew and Mark: "What you hear in your ear, in the other ear proclaim from your rooftops. After all, no one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket, nor does one put it in a hidden place. Rather, one puts it on a lampstand so that all who come and go will see its light."⁷¹⁷

In a statement similar to Matthew and Luke, more of a mixed message is given just a few short chapters later: "The Pharisees and the scholars have taken the keys of knowledge and have *hidden* them. They have not entered, nor have they allowed those who want to enter to do so. As for you, be as sly as snakes and as simple as doves."⁷¹⁸

⁷¹² Galatians 6:6.

⁷¹³ Philippians 1:14.

⁷¹⁴ Acts 6:3,10.

⁷¹⁵ Acts 7:10,22.

⁷¹⁶ Thomas 32.

⁷¹⁷ Thomas 33.

⁷¹⁸ Thomas 39.

And Thomas has Jesus address the mystery of the kingdom: “I disclose my mysteries to those [who are worthy] of [my] mysteries. Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.”⁷¹⁹

Of the other non-canonical gospels, the Secret Book of James offers the explicit purpose of continuing to shroud key features of the gospel message in mystery:

Since you asked me to send you a secret book that was revealed to Peter and me by the Lord, I could neither refuse you nor dissuade you; so [I have written] it in Hebraic letters and have sent it to you -- and to you alone. Nevertheless, you should take care not to disclose this book to many -- the things the Savior did not wish [to] disclose to all of us, his twelve disciples. Still, congratulations to those who will be saved through the trustworthiness of this text.⁷²⁰

Jesus instructs James: “Pay attention to instruction, understand knowledge, love life. And no one will persecute you, nor will any one oppress you, other than you yourselves.”⁷²¹

In the Dialogue of the Savior, Mary is noted as saying: “There is but one word that I shall [sp]eak to the Lord concerning *the mystery of truth*, this one in which we stand and <in which> we appear to the worldly.”⁷²²

In response to a dialogue between Judas, Matthew and Mary, Jesus says: “They see yo[u] and they] see those who receive [yo]u. But look, a true word is coming from the Father [to the] abyss in silence, with a flash of lightning.”⁷²³

Wisdom & Word Summarized: The concept of wisdom and/or word is one that clearly permeates New Testament and extra-canonical gospel writings. The strongest sense of the these mysteries of God are to be found in John’s gospel and the epistles of Paul.

It was John who declared that “the Word became flesh and lived among us.” John’s gospel also indicates that those who know the truth do so because of the word.

Interestingly, John does not use the term wisdom – though Paul freely uses both word and wisdom. The three synoptics also make use of both terms.

The non-canonical Gospel of Thomas appears conflicted on the question of whether the wisdom of God is secret or widely accessible. Secret James and the Dialogue of the Savior lean more to the concept of Jesus’ message as mystery.

⁷¹⁹ Thomas 62.

⁷²⁰ Secret James 1:2-4.

⁷²¹ Secret James 6:27.

⁷²² Dialogue 33.

⁷²³ Dialogue 38:1-2.

25. Women

The role of women in Christianity is a source of increased debate here at the approach to the second millennium. This is not a new discussion, but one that has its roots in the early church – perhaps earlier in the ministry of Jesus.

At least part of the issue has to do with the very nature of God. As the recent author of *A History of God* writes: “Feminists are also repelled by a personal deity who, because of ‘his’ gender, has been male since his tribal, pagan days.”⁷²⁴

Within the New Testament canon, there are noteworthy differences between different writers in terms of the perceived prominence and apparent role expectations for women. The differences are even more striking when non-canonical gospel accounts are included.

Gospels: In all four NT gospels, Jesus has very little directly to say about distinctions between (or expectations of) women versus men. However, there are implied differences. The twelve disciples all are men. Virtually all of the authority figures identified (Romans, priests, etc.) are men. This is not surprising, since both the Jewish and Roman cultures were essentially patriarchal in nature.

However, women are integral to the Jesus story, first, as people who interact with Jesus. Second, women figure prominently in a number of the stories (or parables) told by Jesus.

An appropriate starting point is the gospel of Luke. Of the three synoptics, Luke certainly provides the most coverage of activities by women. *Note:* Accounts unique to Luke’s gospel are indicated by **boldface** type.

⁷²⁴ Karen Armstrong, *A History of God*, 1993.

Lukan Accounts of Women

| Women Involved | The Event |
|---|--|
| Elizabeth | Conception of son John the Baptist (1:5-25) |
| Mary (mother of Jesus) | Visit by the angel Gabriel foretelling the birth of Jesus (1:26-38) |
| Mary & Elizabeth | Mary's visit and the Magnificat (1:39-56) |
| Elizabeth | Birth of John the Baptist (1:57-60) |
| Mary | Travel to Bethlehem and birth of Jesus, followed by visit from shepherds (2:1-20) |
| Mary | Blessing in Jerusalem at circumcision from Simeon (2:21-35) |
| Anna | Blessing from a prophetess (2:36-38) |
| Mary | Admonishment to Jesus followed by observance of Jesus' actions after return to Nazareth (2:42-52) |
| Herodias | John denounces Herod the tetrarch over marriage to Herodias, his brother's wife (3:19) |
| Simon Peter's mother-in-law | Healed by Jesus at Simon's house. Upon being healed: "Immediately she got up and began to serve them." (4:38-39) |
| Widow (with dead son) | Jesus resurrects dead son, then gives him back to his mother. (7:11-17) |
| Sinner | Anoints Jesus at with tears and myrrh. Jesus forgives her sins, tells her to go in peace. (7:36-50) |
| Mary (Magdalene), Joanna & Susanna | Described as "some women" who traveled with the 12 disciples and "provided for them out of their resources." (8:2-3)⁷²⁵ |
| Mary (mother of Jesus) | Comes with brothers to see Jesus, but rebuffed by crowd and Jesus (8:19-21) |
| Jairus' daughter | 12-year old resurrected by Jesus. (8:40-41, 49-56) |
| Woman in crowd | Healed by touching the fringe of Jesus' cloak. After discovering who touched him, Jesus says: "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace." (8:43-48) |
| Martha & Mary | Mary is commended for listening to Jesus' words, while Martha is distracted by serving. (10:38-42) |
| Queen of the South | Will be brought back to life at the time of judgment to condemn members of this generation. (11: 31)⁷²⁶ |
| Woman in synagogue | Healed by Jesus after 18 years of affliction and unable to straighten up. After healing, she praises God. (13:10-13)⁷²⁷ |
| Woman with coins (parable) | Jesus: "Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." (15:8-10) |
| Lot's wife | Jesus: "Remember Lot's wife. Those who try to make their life secure will lose it, but those who lose their life will keep it. I tell you, on that night there will be two in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. There will |

⁷²⁵ Mary is described as being from Magdala and one from whom seven demons had been removed; Joanna is identified as the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward.

⁷²⁶ This is the queen of Sheba, described by the OT in I Kings 10:1-10. For Jesus, her authority appears to be because "she came from the ends of the earth to listen to the wisdom of Solomon."

⁷²⁷ In response to criticism from the leader of the synagogue for healing on the Sabbath, Jesus asks: "And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the Sabbath day?" (Luke 13:16)

| Women Involved | The Event |
|---|--|
| | be two women grinding meal together; one will be taken and the other left.” (17:32-35) |
| Widow (& judge in parable) | Jesus: “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Grant me justice against my opponent.’ For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, ‘Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.’ “ (18:2-5) |
| Needy Widow (giving at collection box) | Jesus: “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them; for all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on.” (21:3-4) |
| Slave Woman | Suggests that Peter was a follower of Jesus, leading to Peter’s first denial (22:56-57) |
| Women (mourning Jesus as he is led to the cross) | Jesus turning to them: “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For the days are surely coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.’ “ (23:28-29) |
| Women from Galilee (including Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James) | Come along to see how Jesus is buried (on Friday). Return on Sunday and find the stone rolled away from the tomb, see two men “in dazzling clothes”, return and tell the 11 disciples what has happened. The women’s story is received by the disciples “as an idle tale, and they did not believe them.” (23:55-24:11) |

Note: Events identified in **boldface** are found only in Luke.

Based on the listing provided above, the essentials of only 9 of 27 recollections involving women recounted by Luke also can also be found in the other two synoptics.⁷²⁸ Essentially, two-thirds of the accounts noted are unique to Luke’s gospel.

A series of eight other events relating to women are found in Matthew (with some references shared by Mark):

Both Luke and Matthew have an angel appear to Joseph suggesting he take Mary as his wife. *Only Matthew* reaches back to quote (or misquote) Isaiah’s: “Behold, a virgin will conceive a child and she will give birth to a son, and they will call him Emmanuel.” (1:23, from Isaiah 7:14)⁷²⁹

Only Matthew also reaches back to quote Jeremiah after describing Herod’s murder of the innocents at Bethlehem: “A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled; because they are no more.” (2:18, from Jeremiah 31:15)

⁷²⁸ The passage in Luke 17:32-35 is found partially outside of Luke. Only Luke mentions the remembrance of Lot’s wife.

⁷²⁹ Matthew appears to quote from the Greek Septuagint, which gives the term virgin. The original Hebrew uses the word *almah*, meaning maiden or young woman.

As part of the sermon on the Mount, *only Matthew* records Jesus saying: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” (5:27-28)

Jesus’ statement “Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he” has *no parallel* in the other New Testament gospels. (11:11) *Note:* A similar statement is also recorded in the non-canonical Gospel of Thomas (46:1-2)

Both Matthew and Mark tell of Jesus chastising the Pharisees for their traditions regarding washing before meals but dishonoring their “father or mother” by supporting God rather than parents. (15:1-9, also Mark 7:1-13)

Matthew and Mark also are the only synoptics to record Jesus’ singular encounter with the Canaanite woman. Matthew’s narrative has Jesus at first refusing to answer the woman shouting at him to have mercy on her and her demon-possessed daughter. The disciples suggest: “Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.” Jesus comments: “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” The woman then comes and kneels before Jesus: “Lord, help me. It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs. Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” Jesus finally relents: “Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.” (15:21-28, also recounted in Mark 7:24-30)

Matthew and Mark also provide Jesus’ teaching about divorce in response to the Pharisees’ question about the lawfulness of divorce: “Have you not read that the one who ‘made them at the beginning made them male and female’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together let no one separate.” (19:4-6, also Mark 10:1-9)⁷³⁰

Matthew uniquely provides a sequel to this account, with the disciples commenting: “If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.” Jesus responds: “Not everyone can accept this teaching, but only to those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others, and there are eunuchs who

⁷³⁰ The Pharisees follow up with the question of why Moses allows for a certificate of dismissal for divorce. Jesus answers: “It was because you were so hard-hearted that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so” (19:8, with similar passage in Mark 10:5) The only part of this account also recorded by Luke is Matthew’s summary comment of Jesus: “And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another commits adultery.” (19:9, also found in similar form in Mark 10:11-12 albeit as a statement to the disciples only and in Luke 16:18 as a statement to the Pharisees)

have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone accept this who can.” (19:10-12)

These accounts by Matthew (and Mark) tend to portray women in the context of behavior by men. This is evident, for example, in the discussion of divorce which is described both from a male perspective and as protective of women.

Of the three synoptics, Mark generally seems to exhibit the least interest in the relationship of Jesus to women. There is virtually *no account* of an interaction with one or more women contained in Mark’s gospel that is not also found in either or both of the other synoptics.

However, two of the incidents relating to women are given unique emphasis by Mark, providing added insight. The first incident is the account of the beheading of John the Baptist by Herod Antipas. Of the three synoptics, Mark provides the most detailed account. *Note:* Text that is unique to Mark is noted in *italics*:

“For Herod himself had sent men who arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, because Herod (Antipas) had married her. For John had been telling Herod, ‘It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife.’ *And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed; and yet he liked to listen to him. But an opportunity came* when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet *for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee.* When his daughter Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod *and his guests;* and the king said to the girl, ‘Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it.’ *And he solemnly swore to her, ‘Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom.’* She went out and said to her mother, ‘What should I ask for?’ She replied, ‘The head of John the baptizer.’ Immediately she rushed back to the king and requested, ‘I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter.’ The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, *he did not want to refuse her.* Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John’s head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother.” (6:17-28, portions unique to Mark are in *italics*).⁷³¹

The second unique story given by Mark comes at the end of his book (at least the earliest currently known manuscript). As is reported in the other synoptics, several women (including Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome by Mark’s account) go to the tomb after the Sabbath. They do not find Jesus but are confronted by a young man in a white robe, who tells them that Jesus is raised, and to go and tell the disciples (including Peter) that Jesus is going ahead of them to Galilee. What follows next is

⁷³¹ More abbreviated accounts of this event are found at Matthew 14:3-13 and (in even more abbreviated form) in Luke 3:19-20.

unique to Mark: “So they (the women) went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.”⁷³²

While there are not enough examples available to be conclusive, the two illustrations provided above indicate that Mark may have had a somewhat more cynical view of women. In the account of the beheading of John the Baptist, only Mark finds it important to lay this action of execution to the conspiratorial efforts of Herodias and her mother. Herod comes across as being the person caught in the middle, trapped and thereby forced to execute John against his better judgment.

If women are painted as conspirators in one example, they are portrayed as weak and fearful in the next. Mark’s view of women’s important but befuddled role is emphasized by this being the closing scene of Mark’s gospel (at least the earliest manuscripts).

If Mark offers nothing in the way of unique accounts (albeit with some distinctive twists), the writer of John heads in the opposite direction. *All but one* of Johannine accounts of Jesus’ interactions with women are unique to this gospel:

John’s first recorded adult interaction involving Jesus with a woman occurs at the wedding in Cana. Those interaction occurs with none other than Jesus and his mother. When the wine runs out, his mother says to him: “They have no wine.” Jesus responds somewhat sharply: “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.” His mother takes no apparent heed of her son’s question and comment, instructing the servants: “Do whatever he tells you.” (2:3-5)⁷³³

To Nicodemus, Jesus uses the illustration of being “born from above.” Nicodemus is confused over how one can “be born after growing old” by entering “a second time into the mother’s womb....” Jesus clarifies that he is only using a metaphor: “...no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.” (3:3-5)

Next comes Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman. Jesus starts the conversation at Jacob’s well: “Give me a drink” She is taken back: “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” Jesus: “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” Like Nicodemus, the woman does not understand that Jesus is now speaking metaphorically: “Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?” And so the conversation continues, moving to the woman’s past marriages, to worship, to the Messiah, at which point Jesus reveals himself: “I am he, the one who is

⁷³² Mark 16:1-8. The earliest manuscript of Mark ends here; other later manuscripts attributed to Mark contain verses 9-20 which like other gospels, include Jesus’ appearance to the disciples, commission and ascension.

⁷³³ The miracle of converting water to wine then ensues.

speaking to you.” The disciples return and are “astonished” that he is speaking with a woman but they say nothing. She then leaves and brings a number of people back to hear Jesus. The narrative ends indicating that: “Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, ‘He told me everything I have ever done.’ ” Jesus ends up staying two days by local request before returning to Galilee. (4:7-42)

A disputed Johannine account is of Jesus and the woman caught in adultery.⁷³⁴ Before she can be stoned on the spot, Jesus intervenes: “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone.” The elders back off, one by one, leaving Jesus alone with the woman. Jesus asks her: “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” The woman: “No one sir.” Jesus: “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.” (8:3-11)

Another interaction unique to John’s gospel occurs around the death of Lazarus, brother of “Mary and her sister Martha.” John’s account begins with the two sisters sending a message to Jesus: “Lord, he whom you love is ill.” Jesus delays for two days, though John indicates that he “loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.” When Jesus finally arrives, Lazarus has already been buried for four days. John reports that: “When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.’ ” Jesus and Martha talk about resurrection; Martha expresses her belief in Jesus as the Messiah, then goes to get Mary. Now Mary kneels at his feet, weeps, and echoes her sister’s lament: “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” Jesus asks where Lazarus is buried, then he weeps, then goes to the tomb and orders the stone removed. Martha protests: “Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days.” Jesus: “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” The stone is removed and the resurrection miracle is performed. (11:1-44)

Shortly thereafter, John has Jesus returning again to the home of Lazarus in Bethany. This is the only Johannine interaction with a woman prior to the crucifixion *that also is reported by the three synoptic gospels*. At dinner, Martha serves, Lazarus dines with Jesus, and Mary anoints Jesus’ feet with a nard perfume “wiped with her hair.” Judas Iscariot objects that the money for the perfume would be more appropriately given to the poor. Jesus comments: “Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.” (12:1-8)⁷³⁵

⁷³⁴ The earliest available manuscripts of John do not contain this account. However, as indicated by notes to the *Harper Collins Study Bible (NRSV)*, this account may be based on early oral traditions about Jesus.

⁷³⁵ John’s gospel follows up this scene with a note that the chief priests now also plotted to “put Lazarus to death as well, since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and believing in Jesus.” (John 12:10-11)

At the crucifixion, John reports the presence of several women “standing near the cross” (i.e. Jesus’ mother, his mother’s sister Mary the wife of Cleopas, and Mary Magdalene).⁷³⁶ While the synoptics also note the presence of women watching from a distance, only John indicates that: “When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, ‘Woman, here is your son.’ Then he said to the disciple, ‘Here is your mother.’ ” (19:25-27)⁷³⁷

Unlike the synoptics, John’s gospel indicates that only one woman --- Mary Magdalene – is first on the scene “early on the first day of the week.” She runs and tells Simon Peter who then arrives with “the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved.” These two disciples see the empty tomb and return to their homes. Mary stays behind weeping, encounters two angels in white, then turns around and sees Jesus (but mistakes him for the gardener). Jesus asks: “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” Mary: “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” Jesus says only: “Mary.” Mary: “Rabbouni” (meaning teacher). Jesus: “Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’ ” Mary then goes to tell the disciples: “I have seen the Lord.” (20:1-18)

Without question, John’s Jesus comes across as the most personable in his interactions with persons of the opposite gender. He interacts on a very personal level with women of all social and economic positions – from the affluent Mary and Martha to the Samaritan woman at the well. More than the other gospel writers, John speaks to women more on a peer level, albeit with candid observations freely offered.

In review, it is apparent that each of the four gospel writers portrays women in a different manner – with events and stories that are in some cases similar and, in numerous cases, unique to just one writer. Luke’s Jesus comes across as most understanding and sympathetic to the needs of women. Matthew paints a protective, even patriarchal portrait. Mark generally has less to say about women, but what he does say could be perceived as somewhat more cynical. John’s Jesus gets the most up close, personal, and intimate.

James & Paul: From the brother of Jesus, James, a clear picture of women’s role in early Christianity is less easy to discern. In making the main point of his letter – the primacy of

⁷³⁶ The three synoptics also report the presence of several women at the cross, although each account differs somewhat in the identification of who was there. Matthew’s gospel indicates that: “Many women were also there, looking on from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and had provided for him. Among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.” (Matthew 27:55-56) Mark’s account states: “There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome.” (Mark 15:40-41) Luke reports that “...all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.” (Luke 22:49)

⁷³⁷ John’s gospel then reports that: “...from that hour the disciple took her into his own home..” (John 19:27)

faith – James turns to the examples, first, of Abraham and then, perhaps unexpectedly, Rahab: “Likewise, was not Rahab the prostitute also justified by works when she welcomed the messengers and sent them out by another road?”⁷³⁸

Jesus’ interactions with women as recorded by the four gospel writers, James and Peter may present diverse perspectives, but it is Paul who sets in place a doctrinal framework for women’s role in the Christian church. Many of Paul’s pronouncements are well known and hotly debated at this time of the second millennium, but is worth retracing his views.

To the Romans, Paul attacks Gentiles whom God gave up to “degrading passions.” His first example concerns women: “Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men...”⁷³⁹

In speaking of freedom from the slavery of sin, Paul uses the example of marriage: “Thus a married woman is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives; but if her husband dies, she is discharged from the law concerning the husband. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man, she is not an adulteress.”⁷⁴⁰

As in other epistles, Paul ends Romans by offering personal greetings to a number of individuals starting with: “...our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae, so that you may welcome her in the Lord as is fitting for the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a benefactor of many and of myself as well.”⁷⁴¹

Other women greeted by Paul include:

Prisca (or Priscilla) who with her husband Aquila “work with me in Christ Jesus, and who risked their necks for my life...” (Romans 16:3-4)

Mary “who has worked very hard among you” (16:6)

Junia, a relative along with Andronicus who “were in prison with me.” (16:7)

The mother of Rufus -- “a mother to me also.” (16:13)

“...Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them.” (16:15)

⁷³⁸ James 2:25.

⁷³⁹ Romans 1:26-27.

⁷⁴⁰ Romans 7:2-3.

⁷⁴¹ Romans 16:11.

To the Corinthians, Paul gives his (what appear to be personal) directions concerning marriage:⁷⁴² After stating that both spouses have conjugal rights, Paul focuses on women: “For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does.”⁷⁴³

Paul also expresses his clear preference for the single versus married life, stating that: “...those who marry will experience distress in this life, and I would spare you that.” Moments earlier, he writes to men: “Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be set free.” Then he appears to reverse course, suggesting: “from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none...”⁷⁴⁴

Speaking specifically to women, Paul concludes his discourse on marriage: “A wife is bound as long as her husband lives. But if the husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, only in the Lord. But in my judgment she is more blessed if she remains as she is.”⁷⁴⁵

Paul’s last comments in this first communication to the Corinthians revolve around an unusual discussion involving the topics of headship and head coverings:

But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the husband is the head of his wife, and God is the head of Christ. Any man who prays or prophesies with something on his head disgraces his head, but any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled disgraces her head – it is one and the same thing as having her head shaved. For if a woman will not veil herself, then she should cut off her hair; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or to be shaved, she should wear a veil. For a man ought not to have his head veiled, since he is the image and reflection of God; but woman is the reflection of man. Indeed, man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for the sake of woman, but woman for the sake of man. For this reason a woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman. For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman; but all things come from God. Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head unveiled? Does not nature itself teach you that is a man wears long hair, it is degrading to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory. For her hair is given to her for a covering. But if anyone is disposed to be contentious -- we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God.⁷⁴⁶

⁷⁴² After discussing conjugal rights, Paul indicates: “This I say by way of concession, not of command.” (Romans 7:6) At a later point in this discussion, Paul notes: “To the rest I say -- I and not the Lord...” (Romans 7:12)

⁷⁴³ I Corinthians 7:4.

⁷⁴⁴ I Corinthians 7:27-29.

⁷⁴⁵ I Corinthians 7:39-40.

⁷⁴⁶ I Corinthians 11:3-16.

To the Galatians, Paul offers what many contemporary scholars view as an *olive branch* in the direction of equality. In presenting his rationale for justification by faith, Paul writes: “But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.” Paul becomes even more explicit, suggesting equality in situations traditionally viewed as more hierarchical in nature: “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer *male and female*; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”⁷⁴⁷

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul applies the allegory of Hagar and Sarah to explain the difference between birth to slavery versus freedom:

...these women are two covenants. One woman, in fact, is Hagar, from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery. Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the other woman corresponds to the Jerusalem above; she is free, and she is our mother. ... so then, friends, we are children, not of the slave, but of the free woman.⁷⁴⁸

In writing to the Ephesians, Paul provides a description of the household that has stood as a bulwark both of Christian faith and conflict:

Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior. Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, so as to present the church to himself in splendor, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind -- yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish. In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, because we are members of his body. ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church. Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband.⁷⁴⁹

⁷⁴⁷ Galatians 3:25-26,28, *italics* added. A note in the NIV to this verse indicates that: “Unity in Christ transcends ethnic, social and sexual distinctions.” A more cynical interpretation of the portion of this statement regarding women can be found in the non-canonical Gospel of Thomas, chapter 114.

⁷⁴⁸ Galatians 4:24-31. Paul also may use the Genesis 21:10 quotation “Drive out the slave and her child; for the child of the slave will not share the inheritance with the child of the free woman” as a basis for asking Galatians to put the Judaizers out of the church.

⁷⁴⁹ Ephesians 5:21-33. Chapter 6 which follows contains admonitions for children and parents, slaves and masters.

To the Philippians, Paul specifically urges two women, Euodia and Syntyche: "...to be of the same mind in the Lord." Paul goes on asking a companion to "...help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel..."⁷⁵⁰

To the Colossians, Paul gives a summary version of the Ephesian instructions regarding marital relations: "Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and never treat them harshly."⁷⁵¹

As with other letters, Paul concludes Colossians with greetings to specific individuals including "...Nympha and the church in her house."⁷⁵²

In the first letter to Timothy, Paul voices what appear to be personal preferences regarding proper conduct for women:

I desire, then, that in every place the men should pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or argument; also that the women should dress themselves modestly and decently in suitable clothing, not with their hair braided, or with gold, pearls, or expensive clothes, but with good works, as is proper for women who profess reverence for god. Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty.⁷⁵³

Paul also offers detailed instructions regarding treatment of special groups, particularly widows:

Do not speak harshly to an older man, but speak to him as to a father, to younger men as brothers, to older women as mothers, to younger women as sisters – with absolute purity.

Honor widows who are really widows. If a widow has children or grandchildren, they should first learn their religious duty to their own family and make some repayment to their parents; for this is pleasing in God's sight. The real widow, left alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day; but the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives. Give these commands as well, so that they may be above reproach. And whoever does not provide for relatives, and especially for family members, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

⁷⁵⁰ Philippians 4:2-3.

⁷⁵¹ Colossians 3:18.

⁷⁵² Colossians 4:15.

⁷⁵³ I Timothy 2:8-15. Paul follows up on these admonitions for women with a similarly stringent set of qualifications for bishops and then deacons, chapter 3, verses 1-13.

Let a widow be put on the list if she is not less than sixty years old and has been married only once; she must be well attested for her good works, as one who has brought up children, shown hospitality, washed the saints' feet, helped the afflicted, and devoted herself to doing good in every way. But refuse to put younger widows on the list; for when their sensual desires alienate them from Christ, they want to marry, and so they incur condemnation for having violated their first pledge. Besides that, they learn to be idle, gadding about from house to house; and they are not merely idle, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not say. So, I would have younger widows marry; bear children, and manage their households, so as to give the adversary no occasion to revile us. For some have already turned away to follow Satan. If any believing woman has relatives who are really widows, let her assist them; let the church not be burdened, so that can assist those who are real widows.⁷⁵⁴

Paul's purported second letter to Timothy begins with an acknowledgment of the important role that key women have played in his life:⁷⁵⁵ "I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and you mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you."⁷⁵⁶ Paul concludes this letter with greetings to Prisca (Priscilla) and Aquila.⁷⁵⁷

The letter to Titus contains admonitions for older women and picks up on other themes in the letters to Timothy: "...tell the older women to be reverent in behavior, not to be slanderers or slaves to drink; they are to teach what is good, so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be self-controlled, chaste, good managers of the household, kind, being submissive to their husbands, so that the word of God may not be discredited."⁷⁵⁸

In summary, Paul has of recent been cast (perhaps unfairly) as a misogynist. While Paul's epistles clearly contain what could be construed as conservative teachings (at least by modern standards), the truth is likely more complex.

Paul is unafraid to address women (and women's issues) directly in his letters to various churches. His admonitions to women are often blunt. Paul clearly mixes personal opinions with what he believes to also represent scriptural or inspired truth. At times, Paul is honest enough to state when he strays from matters he perceives as Christian doctrine to personal preference.

⁷⁵⁴ I Timothy 5:1-16.

⁷⁵⁵ Pauline authorship of the pastoral letters to Timothy and Titus is disputed by some modern scholars due to differences in vocabulary and style, as well as different treatment of concepts such as faith, law and righteousness.

⁷⁵⁶ II Timothy 1:5.

⁷⁵⁷ II Timothy 4:19.

⁷⁵⁸ Titus 2:3-5.

It is noted that the two people who most shaped the Christian movement – Jesus and Paul – never had a clear, documented sexual or marital relationship with a woman. So much of Christian theology on the subject of relations between the sexes (particularly marriage) would appear to be based more on theory than practice.

Other New Testament Accounts: With the exception of Peter, other books of the New Testament provide virtually no direct clues as to Jesus' connection with women, except by perhaps indirect reference. However, they do offer information about the role of women in the early church, including the ministry of Paul.

In the Acts of the Apostles, the first reference to a woman occurs with the account of Ananias and Sapphira – who are struck dead after offering then keeping back some of the proceeds from a sale of property.

Two items regarding the wife's role are notable in this account. First, though Ananias sold the property, he reportedly does so “with his wife's knowledge.” Second, Sapphira comes to see Peter three hours after her husband has died, not yet knowing of his fate. Peter questions her independently as to the price received. Her judgment comes after repeating the lie of her husband.⁷⁵⁹

The second account deals with the selection of seven men to serve the needs of widows who were “being neglected in the daily distribution of food” by the early Christian community. Stephen is one of the seven chosen. Luke goes on to note that the number of disciples “increased greatly in Jerusalem,” although a causal link to solution of the food distribution problem is not directly stated.⁷⁶⁰

In his speech to the Council while on trial, Stephen makes interesting reference to Pharaoh's daughter who adopted Moses and brought him up, so that Moses “was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in his words and deeds.”⁷⁶¹

After the stoning of Stephen, the author of Acts observes that: “...Saul was ravaging the church by entering house after house; dragging off both men and women, he committed them to prison.”⁷⁶² Philip preaches in Samaria, and it is recorded that those who believed were baptized, “both men and women.”⁷⁶³

Peter raises Tabitha (Greek name Dorcas) in Lydda.⁷⁶⁴ Later, Peter is delivered from prison and immediately goes “to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark.” The maid Rhoda is so excited to see Peter that she forgets to open the

⁷⁵⁹ Acts 5:1-11.

⁷⁶⁰ Acts 6:1-7.

⁷⁶¹ Acts 7:22.

⁷⁶² Acts 8:3.

⁷⁶³

⁷⁶⁴ Acts 9:36-41.

gate. In announcing Peter's arrival, those who had gathered to pray for Peter tell Rhoda: "You are out of your mind!" The gate is opened only after Peter continues his knocking.⁷⁶⁵

The first woman mentioned in connection with Paul is the mother of Timothy, who is identified as "a believer."⁷⁶⁶ With Timothy in tow, Paul encounters and converts a dealer in purple cloth, Lydia. She apparently was a traveling business woman, whose home was in Thyatira (Asia Minor) but meeting Paul in Philippi (Macedonia). After her baptism, she successfully urges Paul and his entourage to "come and stay at my home."⁷⁶⁷

This account is followed by the story of the slave girl with powers of divination, whose evil spirit is driven out by Paul's command "in the name of Jesus Christ." Paul and Silas are jailed for disturbing the city (and sale of fortune telling), then released, immediately going again to Lydia's home.⁷⁶⁸

In Athens, Paul attracts scoffers but also a few believers including "a woman named Damaris..."⁷⁶⁹ Paul leaves Athens and travels to Corinth, where he stays with a Jew named Aquila and his wife Priscilla both tentmakers along with Paul.⁷⁷⁰

After staying in Corinth for 1-1/2 years, Paul sails for Syria "accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila."⁷⁷¹ A potential competitor to Paul, Apollos, appears in Ephesus: "He had been instructed in the Way of the Lord; and he spoke with burning enthusiasm and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John." Priscilla and Aquila hear him, then take Apollos aside and "explained the Way of God to him more accurately."⁷⁷²

Upon his return to Jerusalem, Paul is arrested and a conspiracy involving more than forty individuals to kill him develops. The son of Paul's sister hears of the planned ambush, then warns Paul in prison, leading to his secret transport from Jerusalem to Antipatris at night.

The Roman governor Felix handles Paul's case, then Porcius Festus, then King Agrippa. For no readily apparent reason, the Jewish wife of Felix, Drusilla, is identified. The author also identifies Bernice, wife of King Agrippa, who sits in on the hearing afforded Paul.

⁷⁶⁵ Acts 12:12-16.

⁷⁶⁶ Acts 16:1.

⁷⁶⁷ Acts 16:15.

⁷⁶⁸ Acts 16:16-40.

⁷⁶⁹ Acts 17:34.

⁷⁷⁰ Acts 18:1-3.

⁷⁷¹ Acts 18:18.

⁷⁷² Acts 18:24-26.

The letters attributed to Peter are more direct in stating explicit views on appropriate roles for women. If Peter differed with Paul on some matters, they appear to be in relatively close agreement on this subject of relations between wives and husbands:

Wives, in the same way, accept the authority of your husbands, so that, even if some of them do not obey the word, they may be won over without a word by their wives' conduct, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. Do not adorn yourselves outwardly by braiding your hair, and by wearing gold ornaments or fine clothing; rather, let your adornment be the inner self with the lasting beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in god's sight. It was in this way long ago that the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves by accepting the authority of their husbands. Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham and called him lord. You have become her daughters as long as you do what is good and never let fears alarm you.

Husbands, in the same way, show consideration for your wives in your life together, paying honor to the woman as the weaker sex, since they too are the gracious heirs of the gracious gift of life – so that nothing may hinder your prayers.⁷⁷³

The second letter of John is addressed from: “The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth, and not only I but also all who know the truth ...”⁷⁷⁴ This short (thirteen verse) book ends with the salutation: “The children of your elect sister send you their greetings.”⁷⁷⁵

The Revelation of John (Apocalypse) provides numerous metaphorical allusions to women. For example, in describing the church at Thyatira, the author states: “But I have this against you: you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet and is teaching and beguiling my servants to practice fornication and to eat food sacrificed to idols.”⁷⁷⁶

A second metaphor is that of the woman “clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars” who is pregnant and “crying out in birth pangs, in the agony of giving birth.” With a dragon standing ahead, the woman gives “birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron.” The child is snatched away, a war in heaven ensues, and “the earth came to the help of the woman.”⁷⁷⁷

A third metaphor is that of the great whore “clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations

⁷⁷³ I Peter 3:1-7.

⁷⁷⁴ II John 1:1.

⁷⁷⁵ II John 1:13.

⁷⁷⁶ Revelation 2:20.

⁷⁷⁷ Revelation 12:1-17.

and the impurities of her fornication; and on her forehead was written a name, a mystery: “Babylon the great, mother of whores and of earth’s abominations.”⁷⁷⁸

A final metaphor occurs with the marriage supper of the Lamb. The writer of the Apocalypse sees “...the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.” An angel leads the writer: “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.”⁷⁷⁹

The Apocalypse ends with the Spirit and the bride jointly beckoning:

“ ‘Come.’
And let everyone who hears say, ‘Come.’
And let everyone who is thirsty come.
Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift.”⁷⁸⁰

From these other New Testament accounts, it is clear that women figure prominently in the early church – post resurrection. Before becoming a follower of Jesus, Paul persecutes men and women alike. After conversion, he ministers to those of both genders.

Paul’s ministry relies on several women – notably Lydia and Priscilla – who are portrayed in caregiver/hostess roles similar to those of several women important to Jesus’ ministry as described in Luke’s gospel.⁷⁸¹ Priscilla teaches Paul’s compatriot (or rival) Apollos; and Paul’s sister provides a warning that saves Paul’s life in Jerusalem.

Other New Testament references are provided by the author(s) of II John and Revelation. John addresses a letter to an “elect lady”, apparently a woman of some prominence. The book of the Apocalypse provides numerous metaphors centered on women, including a woman as the bride of Christ (the Lamb).

Non-Canonical Gospels: If the canonical New Testament offers tantalizing hints of sexual tensions, some of the non-canonical gospels lay bare the sexual politics of the first and second centuries. While more gnostically oriented than the canon, the Gospel of Thomas parallels some synoptic sayings of Jesus:

“A woman in the crowd said to him (Jesus): ‘Lucky are the womb that bore you and the breasts that fed you.’ He said to [her], ‘Lucky are those who have heard the word of the Father and have truly kept it. for there will be days when you will

⁷⁷⁸ Revelation 17:4-5.

⁷⁷⁹ Revelation 21:2,9.

⁷⁸⁰ Revelation 21:17.

⁷⁸¹ This theme lends are consistent with New Testament statements that both Luke and Acts have the same author.

say, 'Lucky are the womb that has not conceived and the breasts that have not given milk.' (Thomas 79)⁷⁸²

"The Father's imperial rule is like [a] woman who took a little leaven, [hid] it in dough, and made it into large loaves of bread." (96:1-2)

"The [Father's] imperial rule is like a woman who was carrying a [jar] full of meal. While she was walking along [a] distant road, the handle of the jar broke and the meal spilled behind her [along] the road. She didn't know it; she hadn't noticed a problem. When she reached her house, she put the jar down and discovered it was empty." (97:1-3)

"The disciples said to him, 'Your brothers and your mother are standing outside.' He said to them, 'Those here who do what my Father wants are my brothers and my mother. They are the ones who will enter my Father's domain.' " (99:1-3)

"Whoever does not hate [father] and mother as I do cannot be my [disciple], and whoever does [not] love [father and] mother as I do cannot be my [disciple]. For my mother [...], but my true [mother] gave me life." (101:1-3)

"Whoever knows the father and the mother will be called the child of a whore." (105)

"Simon Peter said to them, 'Make Mary leave us, for females don't deserve life.' Jesus said, 'Look, I will guide her to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every female who makes herself male will enter the domain of heaven.' " (114:1-3)

More so than any New Testament or non-canonical writer, the Gnostic-leaning Thomas seems to have viewed women with the most apparent disdain. It also is noteworthy that the very last available saying from Thomas suggests strong hostility from a disciple (Simon Peter) toward a woman (most likely Mary Magdalene as evidenced by other non-canonical writings).

Some have interpreted Jesus response as favoring a return to a state of primordial, androgynous perfection.⁷⁸³ Another view could be that Thomas is further refining Paul's commentary of "no longer male and female." Rather than interpreting Paul's writing as indicating an equality of the sexes, Thomas could be interpreted to mean that the disappearance of the two gender roles happens only as women abandon their female character for the sake of a male-oriented role in the service of Christ.

⁷⁸² A somewhat comparable passage is found in Luke 11:27-28. However, Luke records Jesus' response as: "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it."

⁷⁸³ Gnostic texts also suggest that the transition from male to female may be a metaphor for translation from mortality to immortality, from earthly to heavenly existence.

While fragmentary, the text available from the Dialogue of the Savior suggests that Jesus interacted with both male and female followers regarding matters of theological import. A person named Mary is a major part of the dialogue, posing questions and comments such as:

“Lord, tell me, from where [do I] carry the body [when I] weep, and from where (do I carry it) when I [laugh]?” (Dialogue 8:1)

“Where will you set down [the things] about which you asked the son of [Adam]?” (13:1)

“Just so: ‘The wickedness of each day <is sufficient>,’ and ‘Laborers are worthy of their food,’ and ‘Disciples resemble their teachers.’ ” (20:1) The author of the Dialogue then notes: “She (Mary) spoke this word as a woman who fully understood.” (20:2)

“Tell me, Lord, why have I come to this place -- to gain or to lose?” (24:1)

“I wish to understand everything -- [just how] it comes into being.” (26:1)

“Everything that endures in this way is seen.” (31:1)

“There is but one word that I shall [sp]eak to the Lord concerning the mystery of truth, this one in which we stand and ,in which we appear to the worldly.” (33)

“[Of wha]t kind is this mustard seed? Is it from heaven or from earth?” (36:1)

At one point during the Dialogue, Jesus takes Judas, Matthew and Mary to “the end of heaven [and] earth ... and ... the place of the abyss below.”⁷⁸⁴ In response to Mary’s question regarding the mustard seed, Jesus suggests a male/female deity, saying: “When the Father established the world for himself, he left many things with the Mother of All. Because of this he speaks and acts.”⁷⁸⁵

While Jesus interacts well with Mary, at one point he provides a less charitable view of the role of women. Judas asks Jesus: “Why then, in truth, do <the living> die and <the dead> live?” Jesus answers: “Whatever is from the truth does not die; whatever is from woman dies.”⁷⁸⁶

The Gospel of Mary offers an even more explicit view of the tension involving male disciples versus the perceived special status of Mary (Magdalene).⁷⁸⁷ Upon issuing a

⁷⁸⁴ Dialogue of the Savior 17:1-3.

⁷⁸⁵ Dialogue 36:3.

⁷⁸⁶ Dialogue 23:1-2.

⁷⁸⁷ Dating of the original gospel is highly speculative, but it has been argued that the Gospel of Mary may have been written sometime in the later first of early second century.

commandment to “preach the good news of the domain” (much as is recorded in the four gospels), Jesus leaves them. The disciples “were distressed and wept greatly”.

It is at this point that Mary takes command: “Then Mary stood up. She greeted them all and addressed her brothers: ‘Do not weep and be distressed nor let your hearts be irresolute. For his grace will be with you all and will shelter you. Rather we should praise his greatness, for he has joined us together and made us true beings.’ When Mary said these things, she turned their minds [to]ward the Good, and they began to [as]k about the wor[d]s of the Savi[or].”⁷⁸⁸

Following this, Peter is reported as saying to Mary: “Sister, we know that the Savior loved you more than any other woman. Tell us the words of the Savior that you know, but which we haven’t heard.” Mary then begins to “rep[ort to you as much as] I remember that you don’t know.”⁷⁸⁹

After speaking of the secrets of what she terms the seven Powers of Wrath, Mary falls silent. At this point, gender definitely becomes an issue:

“Andrew said: ‘Brothers, what is your opinion of what was just said? I for one don’t believe that the S[a]vior said these things, be[cause] these opinions seem to be so different from h[is th]ought.’

After reflecting on these ma[tt]ers, [Peter said], ‘Has the Sa[vior] spoken secretly to a wo[m]an and [not] openly so that [we] would all hear? [Surely] he did [not wish to indicate] that [she] is more worthy than we are?’

Then Mary wept and said to Peter, ‘Peter, my brother, what are you imagining about this? Do you think that I’ve made all this up secretly by myself or that I am telling lies about the Savior?’

Levi said to Peter, ‘Peter, you have a constant inclination to anger and you are always ready to give way to it. And even now you are doing exactly that by questioning the woman as if you’re her adversary. If the Savior considered her to be worthy, who are you to disregard her? For he knew her completely <and> loved her devotedly.

Instead, we should be ashamed and, once we clothe ourselves with perfect humanity, we should do what we were commanded. We should announce the good news as the Savior ordered, and not be laying down any rules or making laws.’

⁷⁸⁸ Gospel of Mary 5:1-10.

⁷⁸⁹ Mary 6:1-3.

After he said these things, Levi left <and> began to announce the good news.”⁷⁹⁰

The Gospel of Mary ends here. Clearly, this gospel provides the most open assessment of the tension between the sexes appearing early in the history of the Christian movement. For women, the message of this gospel also is one of hope; Mary prevails over the objections of other prominent male disciples.

Other early non-canonical works provide less direct illumination of early church gender dynamics, but a few telling glimpses remain.

The Infancy Gospel of Thomas purports to shed added light on Jesus childhood. One event recorded is of Jesus’ mother sending him to draw water. He loses his grip on the pitcher from the jostling of a crowd, so it fell and broke. Jesus then spreads out the cloak he was wearing, fills it with water taken back to his mother. The story ends with: “His mother, once she saw the miracle that had occurred, kissed him, but she kept to herself the mysteries that she had seen him do.”⁷⁹¹

Infancy Thomas also provides a particularly vivid account of Jesus’ travels to the temple at age 12. Here’s the story as told by Thomas – picking up after his parents discover him missing on their return home:

“His mother Mary came up and said to him, ‘Child, why have you done this to us? Don’t you see, we’ve been worried sick looking for you?’

Why are you looking for me?’ Jesus said to them. ‘Don’t you know that I have to be in my father’s house?’

Then the scholars and the Pharisees said, ‘Are you the mother of this child?’

She said, ‘I am.’

And they said to her, ‘You more than any woman are to be congratulated, for God has blessed the fruit of your womb! For we’ve never seen nor heard such glory and such virtue and wisdom.’

⁷⁹⁰ Mary 10. According to *The Complete Gospels*, 1994 edition, there are three known manuscripts for the so-called Gospel of Mary. All three are fragmentary, two are in Greek and one Coptic. While uncertain, the text is believed to have been authored in the late first or early second century.

Mary Magdalene is believed by some to have emigrated to what is now southern France. Laurence Gardner provides a presentation of evidence for this theory, for example, in his book *Bloodline of the Holy Grail*, 1996.

⁷⁹¹ Infancy Thomas 11:4. This passages parallels two accounts of events affecting Mary, who “treasured all these words in her heart” (Luke 2:19) or “treasured all these things in her heart.” (Luke 2:51)

Jesus got up and went with his mother, and was obedient to his parents. His mother took careful note of all that had happened. And Jesus continued to excel in learning and gain respect.”⁷⁹²

Infancy Thomas ends just after this account of Jesus at age 12. A second infancy gospel focuses more on preparation for the birth of Jesus.

The Infancy Gospel of James begins with a wealthy man Joachim and his childless wife Anne. In happiness for finally achieving conception, the parents donate the daughter to live in the temple. This daughter is Mary, later to be the mother of Jesus. The story then continues with procurement of Joseph as a protector, the pregnancy of Mary and her relative Elizabeth, and eventual birth of Jesus. The gospel ends with the murder of the innocents by Herod, as well as the murder of the father of John the Baptist, the priest Zechariah.

The fragmentary Gospel of Peter contains elements of the resurrection day accounts of Mark and John. This gospel indicates that:

Early on the Lord’s day, Mary of Magdala, a disciple of the Lord, was fearful on account of the Judeans and, since they were enflamed with rage, she did not perform at the tomb of the Lord what women are accustomed to do for their loved ones who die. Nevertheless, she took her friends with her and went to the tomb where he had been laid.⁷⁹³

The women find the tomb open and meet a young man who “was handsome and wore a splendid robe.” The young man tells the women that Jesus is not here but is risen. Then Peter’s purported account, as is also recorded in Mark, concludes with the comment: “Then the women fled in fear.”⁷⁹⁴

Unlike Mark, the Gospel of Peter does not end quite yet, but adds the following fragmentary conclusion:

Now it was the last day of Unleavened Bread, and many began to return to their homes since the feast was over. But we, the twelve disciples of the Lord, continued to weep and mourn, and each one, still grieving on account of what had happened left for his own home. But I, Simon Peter, and Andrew, my brother, took our fishing nets and went away to the sea. And with us was Levi, the son of Alphaeus, whom the Lord...⁷⁹⁵

⁷⁹² Infancy Thomas 19:6-12.

⁷⁹³ Gospel of Peter 12:1-2. This account also provides one possible way of reconciling the apparent contradiction of whether just Mary went to the tomb, or other women also.

⁷⁹⁴ Peter 13:1-3.

⁷⁹⁵ Peter 14:1-3, manuscript ends at this point.

The Secret Gospel of Mark consists of only two fragments. Both bear on Jesus relationships to men and women.

The fragments relate to the death and resurrection of Lazarus. The first is to be located between Mark 10:34-35; the second at Mark 10:46. These fragments are controversial, both because of their content and on-going dispute regarding authenticity of the purported manuscript.⁷⁹⁶

And they come into Bethany, and this woman was there whose brother had died. She knelt down in front of Jesus and says to him, 'Son of David, have mercy on me.' But the disciples rebuked her. And Jesus got angry and went with her into the garden where the tomb was. Just then a loud voice was heard from inside the tomb. Then Jesus went up and rolled the stone away from the entrance to the tomb. He went right in where the young man was, stuck out his hand, grabbed him by the hand, and raised him up. The young man looked at Jesus, loved him, and began to beg him to be with him. Then they left the tomb and went into the young man's house. (Incidentally, he was rich.) Six days later Jesus gave him an order; and when evening had come, the young man went to him, dressed only in a linen cloth. He spent that night with him, because Jesus taught the mystery of God's domain. From there <Jesus> got up and returned to the other side of the Jordan." ⁷⁹⁷

"The sister of the young man whom Jesus loved was there, along with his mother and Salome, but Jesus refused to see them." ⁷⁹⁸

The Gospel of the Hebrews also contains several fragmentary items of possible note;

"When Christ wanted to come to earth, the Good Father summoned a mighty power in the heavens who was called Michael, and entrusted Christ to his care. The power came down into the world, and it was called Mary, and Christ was in her womb for seven months." (Gospel of the Hebrews 1:1-2)

"The mother of the Lord and his brothers said to him, 'John the Baptist baptized for the forgiveness of sins. Let's go and get baptized by him.' But he (Jesus) said to them, 'How have I sinned? So why should I go down and get baptized by him? Only if I don't know what I'm talking about' (2:1-2)

⁷⁹⁶ The Secret Gospel of Mark was discovered by Morton Smith in 1958 at the Mar Saba monastery in Jerusalem, as the fragment of a previously unknown letter of Clement of Alexandria (from the period 150-215 CE) Authenticity of this fragment has been questioned by some scholars, in large part because the manuscript reportedly has been unavailable for independent inspection.

⁷⁹⁷ Secret Mark 1:1-13. This account of the initiation of the young man has been construed by some as an initiation into the "mystery of God's domain." Some see this account as potential evidence of a homosexual encounter.

⁷⁹⁸ Secret Mark 2:1-2.

Quoting Jesus: “Just now my mother, the holy spirit, took me by one of my hairs and brought me to Tabor, the great mountain” (4) *Note:* This purported passage is the subject of extensive commentary by early Christian theologians Origen and Jerome⁷⁹⁹

The Gospel of the Ebionites provides a parallel account to what is found in the three synoptics and Thomas when Jesus asks who are his mother and brothers. Finally, it is noted that in the fourth century, Eusebius provides a paraphrase from the Gospel of the Nazoreans, as follows:

The gospel written in the Hebrew alphabet that we have obtained has the threat being made not against the man who had hidden the money, but against the one who had behave dissolutely. He (the master) had three slaves. One squandered his master’s resources with prostitutes and dance hall girls, one multiplied his earnings, and one hid the money. One was later commended, one was merely criticized, and one was thrown into prison. This makes me wonder whether in Matthew the threat that is made after the statement against the man who did nothing might not refer to him, but rather, by the literary device of echoing, to the first man who had been eating and drinking with the drunks.⁸⁰⁰

Jesus & Women in Summary: The modern battle of the sexes beginning in the 1960s may be nothing new, but on a theological basis dates to the early inception of the Christian movement, if not before. While the evidence can be debated, the information

⁷⁹⁹ In the third century, Origen offers commentary on this passage. He explains how “...it is possible for the ‘mother’ of Christ to be the holy spirit which came into existence through the Logos. But these things are not difficult to explain. For if ‘whoever does the will of the heavenly father is his brother and sister and mother,’ and if the name ‘brother of Christ’ applies not only to humans, but also to beings of a more divine rank, there is nothing absurd in the holy spirit being his mother, when anyone who does the will of the heavenly father is called ‘mother of Christ.’ ”

Jerome also comments on this passage in commentaries regarding both Micah and Isaiah. Regarding Micah, Jerome notes: “Whoever has read the Song of Songs will understand that the word of God is also the bridegroom of the soul. And whoever gives credence to the gospel circulating under the title ‘Gospel of the Hebrews which was recently translated, in which it is said by the Savior himself, ‘Just now my mother , the holy spirit, took me by one of my hairs,’ will not hesitate to say that the word of God proceeds from the spirit, and that the soul, which is the bride of the word, has the holy spirit (which in Hebrew is feminine in gender, RUA) as a mother-in-law.

Commenting on Isaiah, Jerome again refers to this passage in the Gospel of the Hebrews, suggesting: “No one should be offended by this, because ‘spirit’ in Hebrew is feminine, while in our language (Latin) it is masculine and in Greek it is neuter. In divinity, however, there is no gender.

Finally in a commentary on Ezekiel, Jerome again refers to the GH passage: “In the Book of Judges we read ‘Deborah’ which means ‘bee.’ Her prophecies are the sweetest honey and refer to the holy spirit, who is called in Hebrew by a feminine noun.”

⁸⁰⁰ Gospel of the Ebionites 8. This passage has been interpreted to mean that the Nazoreans may have been unhappy with the harsh ending from the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30 for the slave who hid the money. So, Nazoreans adds a slave who squanders his resources with prostitutes and dance hall girls, as the greater evil.

available can be viewed as suggesting that each of the major New Testament writers reflected differing views of women's role in the Church to their letters.

At the very least, the extent of these differences appears to be understated by the New Testament accounts that have been canonized. Issues of sexual politics may have been omitted or grossly oversimplified. In particular, the author(s) of Luke and Acts place women in a caregiver role.

While offering definite and what today might be perceived as chauvinistic opinions, the apostle Paul clearly depended on women as key caregivers in his ministry. Finally, in the non-canonical literature, the gender conflict is clearly more open – witness the stark contrasts between the purported gospels of Mary and Thomas.

For those interested in Jesus' view of women's position, the New Testament can provide – at best – tantalizing glimpses into this issue. But the accounts publicly available also can be expected to raise more questions than are answered. And so the dialogue continues.