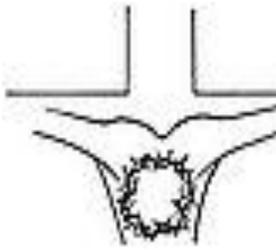


# GOSPELS

## THE STORY OF JESUS



The four gospels are the most distinctive literary product of the early Christian community. They are not biographies in the modern historical sense, nor are they merely collections of anecdotes and sayings. In some respects they are similar to ancient cult legends, Hellenistic biographies and aretalogies, Jewish midrashes, and collections of wise sayings. Yet the gospels are unique accounts of Jesus' teachings and actions.

### SCRAPS FROM TRADITION

The author-redactors wrote the gospels at least a generation after Jesus. They incorporated several literary forms into their narratives. These include:

- pronouncement stories,
- collections of sayings,
- dialogues and discourses,
- parables,
- miracle stories or aretalogies,
- biographical legends, and
- a passion narrative.

No doubt these materials were first preserved by the earliest Christian communities and shaped by their worship, catechetical, and mission activities.

### HISTORICAL JESUS

Reconstructions of the "historical Jesus" must take into account such factors as these:

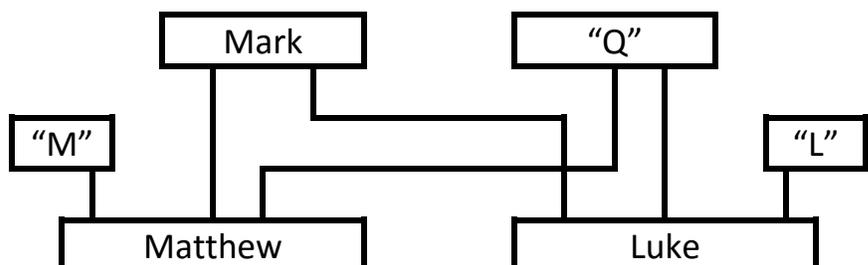
- the fact that he was thoroughly Jewish, from the lower levels of Galilean peasant stock;
- the content of his teachings, primarily aphorisms and parables, whether as a rabbi or prophet or provocative sage or cynic philosopher;
- his reputation as a compassionate healer and exorcist, whether as a miracle-worker or magician or wonder-worker;
- his ability to attract an egalitarian community of followers; and
- the fact that he was executed in Jerusalem as an enemy of the Roman state.

### RELATIONSHIPS AMONG THE THREE SYNOPTICS

A literary relationship between Matthew, Mark, and Luke is obvious:

- All three of these gospels contain many of the same incidents, often told in the same words, usually related in the same order according to the same basic outline.
- Two-thirds of Mark is paralleled in Matthew and Luke, and most of the rest of Mark is in either Matthew or Luke.
- Where Matthew or Luke diverge from Mark's outline, the other usually agrees with Mark.
- Where Matthew and Luke record sayings of Jesus not found in Mark, they tend to agree with each other, and likely came from the same source ("Q").
- Sometimes Matthew and Luke seem to abridge Mark's accounts or to improve Mark's Greek.
- Both Matthew and Luke contain material peculiar to themselves.

The most commonly held hypothesis holds that Mark is the earliest gospel and that Matthew and Luke used Mark and a collection of Jesus' sayings (known as "Q") as well as other traditions (known as "M" and "L") as sources for their gospels. Few scholars continue to affirm the priority of Matthew.



## DISTINCTIVENESS OF JOHN

John’s gospel differs markedly from the others. Whereas the synoptic accounts of Jesus’ ministry require only a one-year period in which he begins his ministry in Galilee and moves toward Jerusalem, John requires two or three years for Jesus to travel to and from Jerusalem several times.

John’s record of Jesus’ ministry before his final week contains few parallels to the events in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Furthermore, John’s literary style is more learned and abstract than the synoptists’ lively popular manner. John uses a more “solemn” vocabulary, and its rhetorical technique includes an extended use of irony.

Even the concepts and ideas stressed in John’s gospel—such as Jesus’ pre-existence as the Word who then became human, his obedience to the Father, his death as a time of glorification, and the sending of the Spirit—are largely foreign to the theological emphases of the synoptic gospels.

## STORIES OF GOOD NEWS

Originally the term “gospel” did not refer to a literary form but to the content of the “good news” about Jesus and what he had done to inaugurate “the kingdom of God” through his life of teaching and healing and especially through his death and resurrection.

The first extended narratives known as gospels were not written until a generation after Jesus’ death. By 200 or 250 CE the four gospels now in the New Testament canon were acknowledged as the ones which from then on would have authority within the Christian church.

Each gospel retains its distinctive character; the four cannot be successfully harmonized in all their details. This diversity reflects the experience of the early church that the impact of Jesus is so multifaceted that no one presentation of his life is adequate to capture the full meaning of his teachings and actions.

MARK	MATTHEW	LUKE	JOHN
Greco-Roman	Palestinian Jewish	Greco-Roman	Jewish Diaspora
Inspirational	Catechetical	Apologetic	Evangelistic
“Son of Man”	“Christ” or “Messiah”	“Lord”	“Son of God”
Tragic	Didactic	Historical	“Spiritual”
Human Predicament – Desired Behavior – Christlike Result			
fear of loss & death	legal hypocrisy	social inequity	death, lying, darkness
faithful following	obedient discipleship	repentance	faith, trust, belief
courage to risk	righteous integrity	compassion & mercy	life, truth, light

## FASCINATING JESUS

Obviously the gospels provide the key for understanding the teachings of the Christian community.

They may be read from several perspectives: as aesthetic literary narratives, or as scientific historical sources, or as theological, devotional and doctrinal documents.

Readers of the gospels have been chiefly concerned with two issues:

### THE CHARACTER OF JESUS

The importance of Jesus can be determined in part by the titles applied to him, such as “Son of Man,” “Christ,” “Lord,” and “Son of God.” But more important is his way of including marginal people within his fellowship, as well as the impact of his death and resurrection.

### THE NATURE OF DISCIPLESHIP

Similarly his followers’ style of living and their organization as a church are to be marked by love and forgiveness.

Their efforts at living out this agenda make the actualization of the gospel an ongoing possibility.

Also, modern readers can still enjoy the impact of these narratives as they come in contact with the personality of the one person who has proved to be the single greatest influence on the development of modern culture.

# MATTHEW

## A KING AND HIS PEOPLE



Matthew's gospel is characterized by several distinctively Jewish traits: The Jewish scriptures are quoted over sixty times. Jesus' teachings are rabbinic in style. Some of the narratives are in the style of a midrash, that is, they expand on the deeper meaning of the story. Five balanced discourses reflect the influence of the Pentateuch.

Most likely the book's original audience was an urban, moderately well-to-do Jewish-Christian congregation which was experiencing opposition from the older Jewish synagogues. It was intended to encourage and direct Christian communities as they struggled to establish themselves apart from their former Jewish roots.

Matthew's otherwise unknown author may have been a former Pharisee, who wrote sometime after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE but before 115. This gospel apparently circulated first in the vicinity of Syrian Antioch.

The gospel of Mark provided the basic source for Matthew. These Markan traditions were enlarged by adding several stories peculiar to Matthew (known as "M" material) and teachings of Jesus available from another source (known as "Q"). These enlargements and revisions emphasize the conviction that Jesus is the fulfillment of the old messianic promises and that the church is the properly constituted descendant with Israel as the people of God.

### FOREIGN MISSIONS

The commission to "go into all the world and make disciples" has undergirded the church's mission into foreign lands.

Is this still the church's main objective?  
Should it be?

Sending missionaries overseas has often been part of western nations' attempt to colonize new territories. Is this a legitimate part of the church's business?

What have been some of the benefits of mission work? What are some of the drawbacks?

Where are our greatest opportunities for mission work today?

#### A. *The Person of Jesus the Christ*

1. *The Genealogy of Jesus (1:1-17)*
2. *The Infancy of Jesus (1:18-2:23)*
3. *John the Baptist prepares for Jesus (3:1-4:16)*

#### B. *The Proclamation of Jesus the Christ*

1. *Jesus begins his ministry in Galilee (4:17-25)*
2. **1st Discourse: Teachings on discipleship (5:1-7:29)**
3. *Jesus demonstrates his messiahship (8:1-9:34)*
4. **2nd Discourse: Directives for missionaries (9:35-10:42)**
5. *The people of Israel reject Jesus (11:1-12:50)*
6. **3rd Discourse: Parables on the Kingdom (13:1-52)**
7. *Jesus withdraws from Israel (13:53-15:20)*
8. *Jesus ministers outside of Israel (15:21-16:20)*

#### C. *The Passion and Resurrection of Jesus the Christ*

1. *Jesus turns toward Jerusalem (16:21-17:27)*
2. **4th Discourse: Instructions on life in the church (18:1-35)**
3. *Jesus travels to Jerusalem (19:1-20:16)*
4. *Jesus enters Jerusalem (20:17-21:17)*
5. *Jesus ministers in the temple (21:18-24:2)*
6. **5th Discourse: Prophecies of the End Time (24:3-25:46)**
7. *The Judeans seize Jesus during the Passover (26:1-27:10)*
8. *The Roman governor has Jesus crucified (27:11-56)*
9. *The risen Jesus establishes his church (27:57-28:10)*

## A COMMUNITY CONSTITUTION

In Matthew two ideas color the *picture of Jesus*: He is the royal *king*—the Messiah or Christ or Anointed One greater than Moses—promised from olden times to rule God’s people in the End Time. And he is preeminently a *teacher*, whose instructions and commands intensify and surpass the ancient Torah.

The *teachings of Jesus* are directed towards the community of his followers, not merely towards individuals. His demands call for a righteousness that is higher than the ethic of the rabbis, but his imperatives are grounded in the indicative of divine mercy and blessing on those who understand and respond in trust.

The content of Jesus’ teaching can be summarized in the so-called “golden rule” and the double command to love God and neighbor. His law is directed to acts of mercy toward those who are less well off.

The *community of the church* is modeled by the disciples, who live as a family or household, and who follow the way of righteousness. They exist to carry out the mission of their risen Lord confident that he is always with them as their “Emmanuel.”

## AUTHENTIC DISCIPLESHIP

Matthew’s gospel may not work as an organizational constitution for congregations today, and its seeming polemic against the Jewish leaders may sound like an anti-Semitic bias to modern ears.

But as present day readers we need to recognize that Matthew’s critique was directed against the kinds of hypocrisy or double-mindedness in which good inner motives are not matched by outward action, in which outwardly righteous actions are contradicted by an opposite inner disposition, in which moral actions in some situations are not followed by equally moral behavior in more difficult cases, or in which professed love for God is inconsistent with poor treatment of others.

From this perspective Matthew’s agenda for disciples who will be personally committed to following Jesus at some cost or personal sacrifice is still a valid challenge for modern men and women like ourselves. It is especially valuable as a critique of our own churches and religious institutions.



## MARK ALL TOO HUMAN



### PERSONAL INTEGRITY

Like the hero in a classical tragedy, Jesus confronts his divine destiny with compelling integrity, determined to fulfill his agenda for self-giving service in spite of opposition and misunderstanding.

What are the marks of personal integrity that are valued in men and women today?

Is it better in some situations to practice expediency?

Should one risk losing all for the sake of principle?



Although the gospel of Mark is an anonymous document, tradition suggests that it was written by John Mark, an associate of Peter and Paul. It is the earliest of the gospels and was written shortly before or after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman armies in 70 CE.

It may have originated in Rome at a time when the Christian community was beginning to suffer under the persecutions of Emperor Nero. Alternatively, its origins may have been in southern Syria, perhaps Antioch, or in Galilee, the locale of the most successful part of Jesus' ministry.

In many ways the literary form of this gospel is closest to a Hellenistic *bios*, or biography, of a noteworthy person. However, we may want to engage it as a piece of dramatic history in the tragic mode in order to appreciate its profound narrative impact on sympathetic readers today.

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#### *Prologue: Jesus Arrival Is Announced*

1. *He submits to baptism and testing (1:1-13)*
  - A. *Scene One: Jesus Begins His Controversial Ministry in Galilee*
    2. *After his initial preaching he calls his disciples (1:14-20)*
    3. *His healings lead to growing fame (1:21-45) (2:1-3:6)*
    4. *Controversies with religious leaders lead to growing opposition /*
  - B. *Scene Two: Jesus Reacts to Rejection by His Own People*
    5. *Growing opposition leads to rejection by his family (3:7-35)*
    6. *His parables beside the sea lead to divisions (4:1-34)*
    7. *More healings lead to rejection by his home town (4:35-6:6)*
  - C. *Scene Three: Jesus Continues His Ministry Outside of Galilee (6:7-52)*
    8. *He sends out 12 disciples and feeds thousands; John is beheaded /*
    9. *He heals people and argues about food traditions (6:53-7:23)*
    10. *Again he heals and feeds thousands, but his disciples still do not understand (7:24-8:26)*
  - D. *Scene Four: Jesus Journeys with His Disciples toward Jerusalem (9:29)*
    11. *He predicts his death and resurrection and is transformed (8:27- /*
    12. *A second prediction leads to ethical teachings (9:30-10:31)*
    13. *A third prediction leads to more misunderstanding (10:32-10:52)*
  - E. *Scene Five: Jesus Teaches and Argues in and around the Temple (12:12)*
    14. *His entrances into Jerusalem challenge the establishment (11:1- /*
    15. *Controversies in the temple stymie the leaders (12:13-13:2)*
    16. *Final instructions prepare the disciples for his absence (13:3-37)*
  - F. *Scene Six: Jesus Is Arrested, Tried, and Executed*
    17. *The disciples flee the night Jesus is arrested (14:1-52)*
    18. *In the morning he is tried by priests and the governor (14:53-15:20)*
    19. *That afternoon he dies, abandoned by all (15:21-41)*
- Epilogue: Jesus' Resurrection Is Announced*  
20. *Women react to his burial and empty tomb (15:42-16:8)*  
[Appendices (16:9-20)]
-

## JESUS, A COMPELLING FIGURE

Mark pictures Jesus as the “Son of Man,” an enigmatic title which may reflect Jesus’ own self-designation. In its most developed sense it is an apocalyptic title which suggests that in Jesus the kingdom of God has been inaugurated and will ultimately reach its vindication. On the other hand, the title may underscore Jesus’ essential humanity and mortality, as well as his determination to embrace the vulnerability of the human condition and to model a style of living characterized by an absence of pretentiousness and a willingness to serve others. It underscores the fact that his ministry is marked by many ambiguities which make him a compelling personality.

Although from the author’s perspective Jesus’ messiahship is clear, from the viewpoint of the characters in the story his true nature is hidden and often misunderstood. He is an enigmatic figure. The disciples in particular move from acceptance and appreciation of Jesus’ program to misinterpretation and outright rejection. His parabolic riddles seem designed to prevent outsiders from coming to understanding, and his miraculous healings do not lead to faith-filled responses on the part of the people.

In Mark’s narrative Jesus moves inexorably to his destination, a death by crucifixion. This is understood to be part of the divine plan, the design by which God’s kingdom is established. Jesus’ followers, however, are not able to appreciate that agenda. Thus in the end he goes to his death deserted by everyone: his companions, his fellow citizens, the religious and political leaders, the convicts executed with him—even by God himself.

### A READER-ORIENTED OUTLINE

If we read Mark as a dramatic historical narrative in the tragic mode, we can most easily identify with the role of the disciples. The following version of the gospel’s outline summarizes the plot from our viewpoint:

1. *Baptism and testing designate Jesus as God’s Son.*
2. *The first disciples respond to Jesus’ call.*
3. *They share his growing fame as he heals sick and disturbed people.*
4. *They incite controversy which leads to growing opposition.*
5. *The twelve disciples replace the members of Jesus’ family.*
6. *They learn the divisive mystery of Jesus’ parables.*
7. *Their lack of faith leads to rejection by his home-town.*
8. *The twelve go on a mission—John is beheaded—and help feed thousands.*
9. *They watch Jesus heal people and learn about food traditions.*
10. *Again they help feed thousands, but fail to understand.*
11. *The disciples reject Jesus’ prediction of death and resurrection and misunderstand his transformation.*
12. *After a second prediction, they argue about greatness and learn Jesus’ ethical teachings.*
13. *After a third predication they still fail to understand about greatness.*
14. *The disciples enter Jerusalem with Jesus as he challenges the rulers.*
15. *They witness his controversies in the temple, which stymie the leaders.*
16. *Four of them hear Jesus’ final instructions, preparing for his absence.*
17. *All the disciples flee when Judas has Jesus arrested.*
18. *Peter denies Jesus at his trial before the priests; no one defends him before the governor.*
19. *All are absent when Jesus dies, abandoned by God.*
20. *Women hear that the risen Jesus offers to restore his disciples.*

### MOVING BEYOND TRAGEDY

Mark’s dramatic narrative still engages the imagination of modern readers.

Its tragic style is gripping, and its open-ended conclusion has the ability to lure people into continuing the story in their own lives.

Furthermore, contemporary men and women still face the same issue which the author faced, namely: What is of ultimate importance in life?

Readers who identify with the disciples in Mark’s story are enabled to experience what it means to reject Jesus’ program.

Thus this gospel serves as an antidote to failure and enables people to reject a self-serving life style in favor of a more self-giving style of serving others.

It moves its readers beyond a tragic vision of human existence into a “cruciformed” way of living which reflects Jesus’ own values.

## LUKE & ACTS

### THE HIDDEN BENEFACTOR



#### JESUS' PARABLES

Some people believe that we are never closer to the historical Jesus than when we listen to his parables and stories.

How do his parables strike us when we hear them today?

Do they give us a sample of life in the kingdom of God?

In what ways do they surprise us?

In what ways do they challenge us?



The Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts are an anonymous pair of documents. The two books were written sometime around 85-90 CE or perhaps as late as 110-115 CE and intended for a Gentile audience, perhaps located in Rome or southern Greece. Church tradition has maintained that their author, who clearly was not an eyewitness of Jesus' ministry, may have been a companion of Paul named Luke; he may also have been a physician. However, neither of these traditions can be verified.

#### THE FIRST CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Luke-Acts indicates that these accounts of the history of Jesus and the church were based on earlier reports and records. The sources for the gospel would have included:

- the gospel of Mark,
- a collection of Jesus' sayings (known as "Q"),
- other stories about Jesus (known as "L"), and
- other oral traditions.

The sources used for Acts are harder to conjecture and may have included::

- collections preserved in early church centers such as Jerusalem or Antioch,
- traditions about specific people, such as Peter or Stephen or Philip or Paul,
- a personal diary or "we source," and
- a travel itinerary.

The two-volume Lukan narrative is in well-written Greek and shares some of the qualities of ancient histories and biographies. In some places it reads like a novella. This may reflect the author's intention to preserve the significant events in the life of Jesus and the early Christian community in an edifying and entertaining way. An underlying evangelistic or apologetic purpose would have shown that Christianity is compatible with the best of the Roman world. Roman citizens may embrace this religion; Christians may participate in the social structures of the Empire; and both church and society will be better off.

#### THE GREAT BENEFACTOR

Luke's picture of Jesus casts him in the role of the Great Benefactor who is God's agent for bringing wholeness and salvation into the world. Thus he deserves the title "Lord," a title shared with the Roman Emperor and the God of the Jewish scriptures. The benefactions he gave while on the earth were the culmination of the ancient hopes of the people of Israel, and they are subsequently continued by the Holy Spirit working in the life of the church.

Like many other heroic martyrs who deserved accolades for their selfless service for others but who were rejected, Jesus was not appreciated by many of his fellow citizens, especially their leaders. Thus Luke shows an interest in the tragic aspects of Jesus' passion, when he dies as a true martyr.

Jesus was well received, however, by many of the marginal members of his society, including outcasts, poor people, sinners, Samaritans, women and Gentiles. Thus the church's expanding mission and its inclusive fellowship resonate well with concerns for justice.

In spite of opposition and persecution, undercurrents of joy and prayer run throughout Luke-Acts. These are the correct responses which faith-filled people make as they enjoy and share God's benefactions.

## AN OPTIMISTIC AGENDA

Luke-Acts is distinctive among the gospels because it continues the narrative of Jesus by adding a sequel which takes the story farther along in time into the life of the early church.

It is more balanced historically and reflects a more optimistic point of view. Both volumes are full of the deeds and speeches of their principal characters; their words and actions are to be models for later Christians.

The Lukan perspective does not picture the church as a beleaguered sect, nor does it envision an apocalyptic end to the world's history. Rather, it imagines the church as an expanding community, as a movement which has turned into an institution with its own history and which will endure long into the future. That future, according to Luke-Acts, will continue to be filled with divine benefactions.

## TOWARD COMPASSION AND JUSTICE

Modern readers may identify with Luke-Act's agenda for creating a more just and compassionate society. In a world characterized by disturbing social inequities, this vision of an egalitarian movement—empowered by God's Spirit, made up of people from all strata of society, bold enough to confront the established authorities—may still challenge us today and compel us to live out our values in ways which will bring godly benefits to all humankind.

## THE COMMON MEAL

The early Christians apparently celebrated the Lord's Supper in connection with their common meals. How would this have helped strengthen their fellowship?

Do our Holy Communion services today help give our churches a sense of close community?

How about our everyday meals?

What is the social function of eating together?

In what sense can it be said that Christ is present in our table fellowship?

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### Prologue to **Volume One** (Luke 1:1-4)

#### A. *Jesus' Place in History*

1. *Birth and Childhood of John and Jesus* (1:5-2:52)
2. *John's Preaching and Jesus' Commissioning* \ (3:1-4:13)

#### B. *Jesus' Ministry in Galilee*

1. *Teachings and Miracles of Healing* (4:14-6:11)
2. *Sermon on the Plain* (6:12-49)
3. *More Miracles and Teachings* (7:1-9:50)

#### C. *Jesus' Journey from Galilee to Jerusalem*

1. *First Stage* (9:51-13:21)
2. *Second Stage* (13:22-17:10)
3. *Third Stage* (17:11-18:30)

#### D. *Jesus' Ministry in Jerusalem*

1. *Entrance into Jerusalem* (18:31-19:44)
2. *Teachings in the Temple* (19:45-21:38)
3. *Persecution and Martyrdom* (22:1-23:56)
4. *Resurrection and Ascension* (24:1-53)

### Prologue to **Volume Two**, (Acts 1:1-5) and *Jesus' Ascension* (1;6-14)

#### E. *The Apostles' Ministry in Jerusalem* (1:15-2:47)

1. *The Apostles Commissioned on Pentecost* /
2. *The Miracle and Arrest of Peter and John* \
3. *Communal Life* (4:32-5:11) (3:1-4:31)
4. *The apostles' Miracles and Arrest* (5:12-42)
5. *Selection of Seven Deacons* (6:1-7)

#### F. *The Apostles' Ministry in Judea and Samaria*

1. *Stephen's Martyrdom in Jerusalem* (6:8-8:1)
2. *Philip's ministry in Samaria and Gaza* (8:2-40)
3. *Saul's conversion near Damascus* (9:1-31)

#### G. *Peter's Ministry to Jews and Gentiles*

1. *Miracles at Joppa and Caesarea* (9:32-11:18)
2. *A Gift from the Church at Antioch* (11:19-30)
3. *Herod's Treachery and Peter's Imprisonment* \ (12:1-24)

#### H. *Paul's Ministries in Gentile Lands*

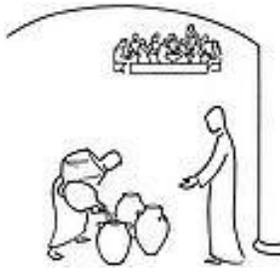
1. *Journeys to Cyprus and Asia Minor* (12:25-14:28)
2. *The Council at Jerusalem* (15:1-35)
3. *Journey to Macedonia and Greece* (15:36-18:23)
4. *Paul's Ministry at Ephesus* (18:24-19:20)

#### I. *Paul's Journey to Rome via Jerusalem*

1. *End of the Ephesian Ministry* (19:21-20:38)
  2. *Trip to Jerusalem and Arrest* (21:1- 23:11)
  3. *Imprisonment at Caesarea under Felix* (23:12-\ 24:27)
  4. *... and under Festus* (25:1-26:32)
  5. *Trip to Rome* (27:1-28:10)
  6. *Paul's Unhindered Ministry in Rome!* (28:11-31)
-

# JOHN

## DIVINITY MADE SIMPLE



### THE JESUS CONNECTION

Jesus of Nazareth may well have been the single most impressive personality to impact the history of the world. Yet it is difficult to assess precisely the character of this Jewish peasant.

Was he a rabbi, a prophet, a teacher, a wonder-worker, a healer, a magician, a revolutionary?

Why did his followers invest him with such titles as “Christ,” “Lord,” and “Son of God”?

How does the figure of Jesus influence us today?

Is there a sense in which he can become a reality for us?

How can we respond or react to his presence?

According to early church tradition, the author of this gospel was Jesus’ disciple John the son of Zebedee. However, the gospel itself is intentionally anonymous. At best it may be supposed that it arose in a school or community associated with the name of John.

Most likely it was based on a body of materials about the traditions of Jesus which grew up in a setting largely different from the synoptics. The material developed along distinctively Johannine patterns before it was organized into a consecutive gospel.

Apparently the gospel was reedited by its compiler. After his death it was put into its final form by another redactor, probably around 90-100 CE at Ephesus or Syrian Antioch.

The language of the gospel has affinities both with popular Greek thought and with the Old Testament. The fact that Jesus is pictured as replacing Jewish traditions suggests that it may have been intended to appeal to Hellenistic Jews in the Diaspora, or to a community of beleaguered Jewish Christians.

John’s central purpose was unabashedly evangelistic: to convert others to its own understanding of Jesus as the Son of God and to its Spirit-endowed community of believers. In so doing, the gospel would have proved to be anti-rabbinic, in that it legitimized the break between the churches and the synagogues, and also anti-Gnostic, in that it anchored speculation about Jesus in the realities of human history.

### LITERARY TECHNIQUES

The format and style of the gospel of John are not at all like the synoptic gospels. In this gospel half a dozen of Jesus’ miraculous signs (\* in the outline) are connected and explained by a series of conversations and discourses. Together they lead up to the final, most significant event, the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, the Son of God.

Several literary devices are used to bring out the underlying meaning of the events:

- Jesus’ figurative language is misunderstood,
- his opponents’ comments prove to be ironically true,
- words and metaphors have double meanings,
- larger sections are included within brackets,
- explanatory notes are inserted into the story,
- dialogues turn into monologues, and
- speeches and themes are duplicated.

Because so few of the events and speeches in John have parallels in the synoptic gospels, especially outside the passion story, it is hard to determine what sources were used by the author/redactor. The basic Johannine building blocks may have included:

- a gospel of signs,
- a collection of sermons, and
- a passion narrative.

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*The Prologue: The Word became Flesh (1:1-18)*

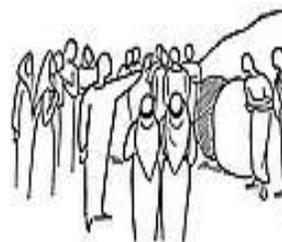
*A. The Signs and Sermons of Jesus, the Son of God*

1. *The first witness of the Baptist to Jesus (1:19-34)*
2. *The calling of the disciples (1:35-51)*
- \* 3. *The marriage at Cana (2:1-12)*
4. *The cleansing of the temple (2:13-35)*
5. *The conversation with Nicodemus (3:1-21)*
6. *The second witness of the Baptist to Jesus (3:22-36)*
7. *The conversation with the Samaritan woman (4:1-42)*
- \* 8. *The healing of the officer's son (4:43-54)*
- \* 9. *The healing at the pool of Bethzatha (5:1-47)*
- \* 10. *The feeding of the five thousand (6:1-71)*
11. *The first controversy in Jerusalem (7:1-8:59)*
- \* 12. *The healing of the man born blind (9:1-10:21)*
13. *The second controversy in Jerusalem (10:22-42)*
- \* 14. *The raising of Lazarus (11:1-12:11)*
15. *The conclusion of the public ministry (12:12-50)*

*B. The Exaltation of Jesus, the Son of God*

1. *The washing of the disciples' feet (13:1-30)*
2. *The last discourse (13:31-14:31)*
3. *Additional discourses (15:1-16:33)*
4. *The prayer of Jesus (17:1-26)*
5. *The arrest of Jesus (18:1-11)*
6. *The Jewish trial and Peter's denial (18:12-27)*
7. *The trial before Pilate (18:28-19:16)*
8. *The crucifixion of Jesus (19:17-30)*
9. *The burial of Jesus (19:31-42)*
10. *Jesus' appearance to Mary Magdalene (20:1-18)*
11. *Jesus' appearance to the disciples (20:19-23)*
12. *Jesus' appearance to Thomas (20:24-29)*
13. *The Conclusion (20:30-31)*

*Appendix: Jesus appearance in Galilee (21:1-25)*



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## **ONGOING FOCUS ON JESUS**

A number of key themes—Father and Son, love and judgment, truth and falsehood, life and death, light and darkness, and the like—repeat themselves and interweave in a deceptively simple manner, and all converge on the person of Jesus, the one who comes from the Father and returns to him. John's gospel moves in a direction which allows the impact of Jesus' ministry to be appropriated on a larger symbolic or "spiritual" level, without negating the historical reality of his earthly career.

Thus Jesus' arrival becomes the incarnation of the eternal Word; his miraculous deeds become signs of a greater truth; his teachings become sermons for the ages; and his execution becomes his heavenly exaltation. The effect is to allow a wider audience than John's original auditors, including later generations of readers, to readily enter into a relationship with Jesus. Thus Jesus' mother and "beloved disciple" become models for later followers; the Spirit becomes the "Paraclete" which counsels and comforts us; and the End Time becomes realized as a present experience for us today.