

New Testament Survey

Week 1 — Introduction & Gospel of John



Course Overview

Welcome to New Testament Survey!

Over the next 6 weeks we'll be exploring the structure and content of the New Testament with specific emphasis on how the parts relate to the whole. We hope that this course will both deepen your working knowledge of the Bible and enrich your understanding of the essence of the New Testament's teaching. Above all we hope that the experience will be enjoyable and that it will inspire you to deeper study of God's Word.

| Wk | Session 1 | Session 2 |
|----|--|---|
| 1 | Introduction to the New Testament and Overview | Introduction to the Gospels. Gospel According to John |
| 2 | The Gospel According to Matthew and Mark | The Gospel According to Luke and the Acts of the Apostles |
| 3 | Pauline Epistles (Eschatological) | Pauline Epistles (Soteriological) |
| 4 | Pauline Epistles (Prison) | Pauline Epistles (Pastoral) |
| 5 | Non-Pauline Epistles (Peter and Jude) | Non-Pauline Epistles (James & Hebrews) |
| 6 | Non-Pauline Epistles (John) | Non-Pauline Epistles (Revelation) |

Session 1: Introduction to the NT, and Overview

A. The Structure of the New Testament Canon

The New Testament consists of 27 Books including **4 Gospels, 1 Historical Narrative, 1 Apocalyptic writing, 21 Epistles.**

The Gospels include **Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.**

The book of **The Acts of the Apostles** is an historical narrative which serves as a follow up to Luke's gospel and is penned by the same author.

The New Testament epistles can be broken up into two categories:

- 1. The Pauline epistles:**
 - a. **Eschatological** epistles - 1 & 2 Thessalonians
 - b. **Soteriological** epistles - Galatians, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Romans

- c. **Prison / Ecclesiological** - Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, Philippians
 - d. **Pastoral** epistles - 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus
2. **The General or Catholic epistles:**

Hebrews, James, 1 & 2 Peter, 1,2 & 3 John, Jude

The final book in the New Testament is the book of **The Revelation of Jesus Christ** and it is an apocalyptic writing.

What is the ‘Canon’ of New Testament Scripture? The word means ‘measuring stick’. It indicates a standard, norm or rule. The scriptures are pieces of writing that measure up to the standard of how God wants to be represented, or how his truth requires him to be communicated to us. The Old Testament precedent of canon informed the New Testament compilers.

In 386AD the Council of Nicaea attempted to attain consensus on what writings were authoritative and inspired. Their ecumenical survey found 27 writings, ‘books’, to be considered inspired – what we now call the New Testament. The canon is a recognition of what most Christians already determined to be authoritative.

B. The Integrity of the New Testament

The New Testament has undergone a long and complex process of transmission (see Handout). The writings we have today however are very credible based on the wealth of copies we have to compile and compare. There is ample evidence of the accurate transmission of the text.

The credibility of historical documents depends heavily on the number of copies available to us, how soon after the original those copies were produced, and our ability to cross reference them with other historical texts.

There is only 30-35 years between John’s original writing (AD90ish) and the earliest copy we have (AD125ish). This is the closest gap between original and earliest copy that we have in the way of historical writings. The next best supported historical document is ‘Cesar’s Wars’, where there is a 600 year gap between original and the first copy (and there are only 10 copies). Differences in material and graphology help us to determine the date that the copy was written.

- Papyri – earliest material that recorded NT – 5890 pieces of NT writing or the entirety thereof. Written in Unicals – no punctuation or spaces, all capitals.

- Velum – later copies of NT written on animal skins. Written in Miniscules – simple punctuation, spaces, upper and lower case.
- Lectionaries - Prescribed readings for the church calendar in first few centuries of the early church. Important because people couldn't read for themselves. This was their way of disseminating Biblical truths. If we lost all of the Papyri and Velum copies, we would still have the whole Bible recorded in Lectionaries.

The scriptures were also translated into numerous languages around this time: Syriac, Latin, Coptic.

C. Jewish Factions and Institutions in the New Testament Period

1. THE PHARISEES: Devotion

This group originated from the devout group known as the Hasidim whose spiritual zeal and devotion won the hearts of the people. They were supernaturalists who firmly believed in angels and demons, anticipated bodily resurrection and accepted the notion of personal immortality. They stressed obedience to the Mosaic Law and valued the Old Testament Scriptures very highly.

2. THE SADDUCEES: Tradition

This was a priestly group concerned with pragmatism and political gain. They were cold and indifferent in their faith and had little passion or love for God. They doubted the supernatural and did not believe in the resurrection of the dead.

3. THE ZEALOTS: Revolution

The zealots were a patriotic party started with the intention of hostile resistance to Roman oppression. According to Josephus the zealots resorted to violence and assassination in their struggle against Rome and were the cause of the Roman war in 70 AD that resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem. Simon the zealot was a disciple of Jesus and was distinguished from Simon Peter by this term (see Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13).

4. THE SANHEDRIN: Government

This group of 70 men served as the highest court and governing Jewish authority. It was dominated by the aristocratic priesthood and was therefore full of Sadducees. When Judea became a Roman province (after Herod's death – 6 AD) this group assumed control of the nation's internal affairs.

5. THE RABBIS: Instruction

The Rabbis were the teachers of the community who instructed the people in the way of the law. The word ‘Rabbi’ means “my master” and was a title of respect.

6. THE ESSENES (DEAD SEA COMMUNITY)

This group was a radical sect which lived in communities, quietly awaiting the Messiah, and had their own rules and regulations governing their communal life. This community became well known with the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

7. THE TEMPLE:

This was the centre of Jewish ceremonial worship and the gathering point for Jews and Proselytes alike during the nation’s annual festivals.

8. THE SYNAGOGUE:

During the years in exile, the Jewish remnant began study groups to preserve their religious and social way of life. These groups continued to function while the temple was being rebuilt and in Jerusalem. These groups later developed into neighbourhood centres that were used for education in the Mosaic Law.

9. THE SAMARITANS:

The Samaritans were a “mixed race” of Jews contaminated by foreign blood and false worship. The Jewish historian Josephus indicates that the Samaritans were also opportunists. When the Jews enjoyed prosperity, the Samaritans were quick to acknowledge their blood relationship. But when the Jews suffered hard times, the Samaritans disowned any such kinship, declaring that they were descendants of Assyrian immigrants. As a result, there was a great deal of enmity between the two.

D. Defining Periods Leading up to the New Testament Period

The region of Palestine gains its significance for the Bible student with the beginning of the biblical period. But the area was inhabited by other cultures long before Abraham and his family arrived.

1. Primeval History

Pre-biblical Period (Tower of Babel—2000 B.C.) — As the human race was scattered over the earth, a number of cultures emerged. Small city-states began to be organised in Mesopotamia, the land between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. A Sumerian civilisation (about 2800–2360 B.C.) was one of the earliest classical civilisations of the world. The Akkadians also built their cities in the Tigris–Euphrates plain. Almost at the same time Egypt emerged as a unified

nation. In the 29th century B.C. the kingdoms of Upper and Lower Egypt were united, and a world power was born. Palestine witnessed the same urban development and population increases during this period. The cities of Jericho, Megiddo, Beth Shan, Ai, Shechem, Gezer, Lachish, and others were all in existence at this time.

2. Patriarchal History

Old Testament Period (Abraham—2000 B.C. and after) — About 2000 B.C. the patriarch Abraham arrived in Canaan from Ur of the Chaldees and found the land controlled by Amorites and Canaanites. Abraham lived for a while in Egypt, where he was exposed to this great culture of the ancient world. He eventually returned to Palestine, where the wealth and influence of his family and his descendants expanded through the land.

For 430 years the descendants of Abraham were in Egyptian bondage, but God raised up a champion in Moses to lead them back to the Land of Promise (Exodus 3). God raised up a successor as the new leader of Israel, Joshua (Josh. 1:1–9), and he led the people in successful campaigns to win control of Palestine (Josh. 11:16–23). The period of the judges that followed indicated the continuous struggle that Israel had with the peoples of the land (Judg. 2:16–23) as well as with their own devotion to God.

With the rise of the United Monarchy under David (2 Sam. 8:1–18) and Solomon (1 Kin. 9:15–11:13), the people of Israel extended their influence over more of Palestine than ever before but around 920 B.C. Israel was divided into two segments, the northern kingdom of Israel, and the southern kingdom of Judah. These were turbulent times in the history of Israel. The Old Testament period came to an end with the fall of Samaria, the capital of Israel, in 722 B.C. The Assyrians took Israel into captivity and this nation ceased to exist (2 Kin. 17:1–6).

3. From the Exile to the Empire

Babylonian Period (605–539 B.C.) — The influence of the Babylonians in the land of Palestine was swift and deadly. In 605 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, annihilated the Egyptian army, effectively controlling all of Palestine to the Egyptian border. In 597 B.C. Jerusalem was attacked by the Babylonians. Jehoiachin the king was carried into captivity. Eleven years later the city of Jerusalem was destroyed and nearly all the Jewish inhabitants of Palestine were carried away as captives to Babylon (2 Kin. 25:1–21).

Persian Period (539–332 B.C.) — When Cyrus, the king of Persia, conquered Babylon, he allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem. In 538 B.C. the first group of Jews returned to Jerusalem under Sheshbazzar (Ezra 1:1–11). As a Persian province, the region was governed by regional rulers under Persian authority.

4. The Intertestamental Period

Greek Period (332–167 B.C.) — During this period Alexander the Great conquered Palestine. Upon his death the land fell to the Ptolemies of Egypt and the Seleucids of Syria. In 167 B.C. the Seleucid king Antiochus IV (Antiochus Epiphanes) polluted the Jewish Temple by offering pigs on the altar and putting up a statue of a pagan god.

Maccabean Period (167–63 B.C.) — Under the leadership of the aged priest Mattathias and his sons, the Jewish people revolted against the Seleucids and enjoyed nearly 100 years of independence.

Roman Period (63 B.C.—A.D. 330) — In 63 B.C. Pompey conquered Palestine for Rome. From 37 B.C. until 4 B.C. Herod the Great ruled the land under the Caesars. During the reign of this Herod, Jesus was born in Bethlehem. During Roman rule also, Christianity was born. In A.D. 70 Jerusalem was destroyed by the Roman general Titus as he crushed a revolt by the Jewish people.

5. The Apostolic Age and thereafter

Pre-Modern Period (A.D. 330–1917) — During these years, Palestine was under the successive rules of the Byzantines (330–634), the Arabs (634–1099), the Crusaders (1099–1263), the Mamelukes (1263–1517) and the Turks (1517–1917).

The most important historical events during this period were Saladin's consolidation of his control of Egypt, Syria, Mesopotamia, and most of Palestine in A.D. 1187 by his victory over the crusader kingdom of Jerusalem and the establishment of the Turkish Ottoman Empire in A.D. 1517.

Modern Period (1917—Present) — In 1917 the Balfour Declaration liberated Palestine from Turkish rule and placed the land under the control of Great Britain. On May 14, 1948, the modern State of Israel was established, and the British withdrew. Almost immediately the Jews and Arabs began their struggle for control of the land of Palestine. The borders of Palestine have been in a state of flux ever since.

6. Significant Dates

538 BC Cyrus, ruler of the Persian Empire conquers Babylon and frees all Jews who had been exiled there. The Jews return to Jerusalem in three stages under Joshua, Nehemiah and Ezra and begin to reorganise. Ezra compiles a final version of the Mosaic Law that is used to govern religious and social life.

330 BC Alexander the Great takes over the Persian Empire and introduces classical Greek culture.

- 200 BC A minority group known as the Hasidim (pious ones) begin a “revival” of Judaic religion and introduce a belief in the resurrection from the dead.
- 167 BC Persecution by the Syrians against the Jews.
- 160 BC Armed resistance under the Hasmonean family (Maccabeas) brings about peace. Jews become an independent nation once again.
- 135 – 75 BC Hasmoneans continue to rule in a loose and unstructured fashion and continue their conquests in taking back the land of Israel.
- 63 BC The Roman Empire imposes its domination when Pompey captures Jerusalem.
- 40-4 BC Herod the Great rules during this time. Jesus is born around 4 BC.

E. The Old Testament and Intertestamental Writings

The Old Testament

- Torah - “the Law” or the Pentateuch (Pent = 5), the first five books.
- Prophets – Joshua to 2 Kings and Isaiah to Malachi (not including Ruth, Lamentations and Daniel)
- Writings – 1 Chronicles to Song of Songs (including Ruth, Lamentations and Daniel)

Most Jews were not literate. Only males went to ‘school’. Their education consisted in memorising the Torah. Jesus’ teachings required a massive shift in worldview, in understanding the law and the ultimate purpose it served and the implications of the covenant of grace on Holy living.

The Old Testament is an incomplete story: It prophesies what the New Testament fulfils. It all points to Jesus. Saint Augustine said, "The old is revealed in the new, and the new is hidden in the old."

Intertestamental Writings

These were religious and historical Jewish writings that began to be used during the period between the Old and the New Testaments. Although considered to be religious writings they were not considered to be equal to the Jewish canonical books. In 95 AD the Pharisees called a council at Jamnia to re-organise the Jewish community and establish a Jewish canon. Here they excluded all the books written in Greek. In 384 A.D. the decree of Damasius established the first canon of the Christian Bible and accepted books proper to the Greek Bible,

including those rejected by the Jews at Jamnia. These books however were still considered to be Deuterocanonical, that is, books of a second standard. Twelve centuries later the Protestants departed from the Roman Catholic Church and decided to exclude the books. They referred to them as the Apocrypha, or non-authentic books, yet up until the nineteenth century these books remained a part of the published Protestant Bible. At the council of Trent (1546 A.D.) the Roman Catholic Church, in reaction to the reformation, accepted all of these books for the first time as canonical books in their Bible. These books are:

- 1 and 2 Maccabees
- Chapters 13-14 of Daniel
- Chapters 11-16 of Esther
- Tobias
- Judith
- Baruch
- Wisdom of Sirach (Ecclesiasticus)
- Wisdom of Solomon

These books are not inspired and should not be considered as part of the canon of the church. They are simply Jewish religious and historical writings that help to clarify intertestamental times.

There are two categories of intertestamental literature:

- The Apocrypha – “not inspired” teachings, Jewish histories.
- Pseudopigrapha – falsely ascribed writings

The Dead Sea Scrolls

These were discovered in a cave in 1947 by a goat-herders looking for their goats. The Dead Sea Scrolls are incredibly important as they are the earliest copy of the OT we now have dating to 200 B.C. i.e. 1000 years older than the next earliest copies we have. They have helped to establish the incredible accuracy of the OT texts. They are now housed in Israel.

Other significant sources

- Rabbinic Materials – Oral histories, traditions and teachings. Never supposed to be written, but were recorded when the Rabbis started to die out.
- Philo – a contemporary of Paul who loved God but was not a Christian. Greek culture influenced his learning and he attempted to marry Judaism to Platonism – Greek philosophical thinking – in an attempt to bring Judaism to non-Jewish people.
- Josephus – Commander of the Jewish revolt. Caught by Romans but avoided the death sentence. He managed to become one of Cesar’s closest friends and changed his name to

Flavius (a Greek name). Josephus was asked by Cesar to write about the Jews (a Jewish history) in a way Greeks could understand. His histories use Greek gods, Greek cultural references and Greek histories to interpret the Christian movement.

Conclusion

Jesus is the unmistakable centrepiece of the Biblical story. He is the metanarrative of the Bible as a whole, not just of the New Testament. The Old Testament prophecies about Him, the New Testament tells of the fulfilment of those prophecies in his life, and of how he will come again. When you study the New Testament, everything you read must be understood through the complete and final work of Jesus on the cross and the Covenant of Grace that it represents.

Session 2: Introduction to Gospels & Gospel of John

A Introduction to the Gospels

1. The name "gospel"

The four Christian gospels are records of the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. They are, however, more than historical narrative and biographical detail. Essentially, all four gospels function as a message and an invitation. The gospels are unique as a form of literature meaning that there is no equivalent in secular literature to the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

The word "gospel" is <euaggelion> in the Greek, and means "news", and if the effect of the Greek eu is reckoned, then "good news" or "good tidings". It never occurs in the plural in the New Testament, evidence that it had become a *terminus technicus* (technical terminology, or special name) for the message of God's salvation in Jesus Christ, and that no other item of news was comparable in value or effect.

2. The four gospel accounts

The initial spread of the gospel account was by telling and preaching. Only as the generation of eyewitnesses became thinned-out by death and distance did it become necessary for written accounts to be published. This occurred in numerous places, although only four such accounts have been accepted as authoritative by the church as a whole.

Since the four gospels arose in different settings and to meet the needs of specific local groups, once the general church became aware of the multiplicity of gospels it was too late to insist on one "standard" version. There were now disadvantages and advantages to the situation:

- (i) *disadvantage*: as heretical movements arose, they tended to adopt the gospel which best suited their point of view. Matthew suited the Ebionites, Luke the Marcionites, and John the gnostic sects;
- (ii) *advantage*: the multiplicity of gospels implied a multiplicity of witnesses. The four accounts agree with each other to such a vast extent that they corroborate one another. The four gospels are essentially four witnesses, from four different perspectives, to the reliability of the gospel story.

3. The synoptic issue: the problem of source

If one sets the four gospels side by side, it becomes apparent that Matthew, Mark, and Luke have much in common. Each gospel

arranges its material in a similar fashion, and each gospel casts the life of Jesus within the framework of a Galilean ministry that extended from Jesus' baptism to His death, with emphasis on His final days.

The similarity of the gospels also includes their content. The first three gospels recount many of the same incidents or teachings, and often in the same or related wording. A glance, for example, at the baptism of Jesus as related by Matthew (3:13–17), Mark (1:9–11), and Luke (3:21–22) will quickly demonstrate their agreement. Because of this similarity in arrangement, content, and wording, the first three gospels are called synoptic gospels (from the Greek synopsis, “a seeing together”).

The Gospel of John presents a more independent account of Christ. John's relationship to the first three gospels can be considered only after a thorough discussion of the Synoptics and their sources.

The synoptic problem arises from the attempt to explain the general similarity of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, while accounting for their individual differences. Two of the four gospel writers (Mark and Luke) were not eyewitnesses of the events they relate, and some question remains about the other two. This means we cannot assume that the similarities and differences among the gospels come solely from their personal perspectives as interpreters of Jesus and His ministry. Other sources also probably contributed to the composition of the four gospels.

In the past 200 years, a great deal of scholarship has been devoted to recovering such possible sources, though it is doubtful whether the puzzle has been fully resolved. The theories advanced generally fit one of two categories. One possibility is that the synoptics depend on a prior source that is now lost, except as it is preserved in the synoptics themselves. A second possibility is that two of the synoptic gospels depend on the other gospel. Until about 1800, the church generally accepted the view, first advanced by Augustine, that Matthew wrote the first gospel, Mark abbreviated Matthew, and Luke used both to compose the third gospel.

Mark as a Source. Most scholars now agree that at least two, and perhaps as many as four, sources lie beneath the synoptic gospels. The first and most important of these is the Gospel of Mark—and not Matthew, as the church long assumed. Mark contains 666 verses (excluding 16:9–20, which many scholars consider later additions to the text). A total of 606 of these verses reappear in full or in part in Matthew's Gospel of 1,071 verses; 350 of Mark's verses reappear in Luke's Gospel of 1,151 verses. This means that more than one-half of Matthew and one-third of Luke are composed of material from Mark. Only 31 verses in Mark have no parallel in Matthew or Luke. A number of observations show that Mark, and not Matthew or Luke, is

the prior source. First, Matthew and Luke never agree in arrangement of material when compared against Mark. When either Matthew or Luke disagree in the sequence of events, the other follows Mark.

Second, certain details in Mark's gospel are either omitted or reworked in Matthew and Luke. The latter often refine Mark's awkward expressions; for example, compare Mark 4:1 with Matthew 13:1–2 and Luke 8:4. Inconsistencies in Mark are omitted by Matthew and Luke; for example, compare Mark 2:26 with Matthew 12:3 and Luke 6:3. Mark's frank assessments of the disciples (6:52; 9:32) are omitted by Matthew and Luke, apparently out of respect for their importance as apostles. Mark's references to Jesus' human emotions—for example, grief (14:34), exasperation (8:12), anger (10:14), amazement (6:6), and fatigue (4:38)—are softened by the other synoptics; and examples of Jesus' ability to perform certain actions (Mark 6:6) are deleted by them, too (Matt. 13:58; Luke 4:23).

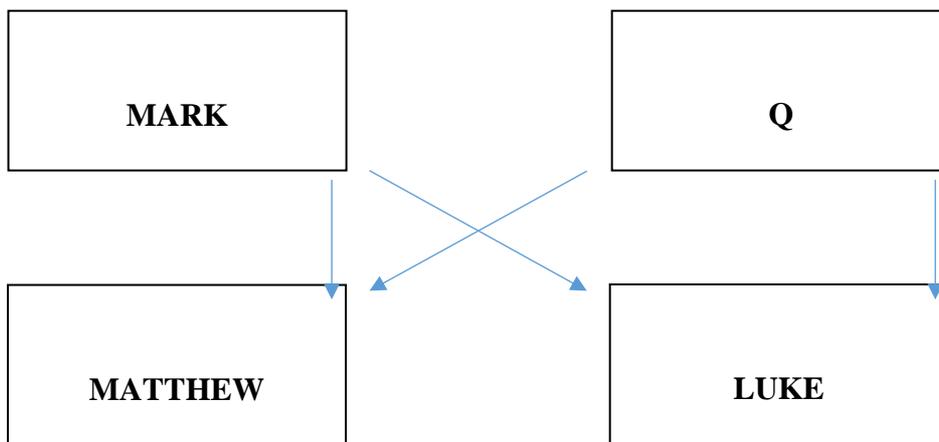
On the other hand, Matthew and Luke on occasion heighten Jesus' accomplishments in comparison with Mark (Mark 1:32, 34; Matt. 8:16). If we assume that Matthew and Luke reworked Mark in these instances, it is possible to explain the differences; but it is practically impossible to do so if we assume otherwise.

Q Source. When the remaining material in Matthew and Luke is examined, the reader discovers that more than 200 verses appear in them, while they have no parallel in Mark. This material, which consists mainly of Jesus' teachings, can be grouped into four categories: (1) Jesus and John the Baptist, (2) Jesus and His disciples, (3) Jesus and His opponents, and (4) Jesus and the future. Scholars assume that this material must have come from a source known only to Matthew and Luke.

For purposes of identification, this source is assigned the name "Q" (from the German, *Quelle*, "source"). Since Q passages agree closely, sometimes to the point of exact wording, it is reasonable to assume that this source was written rather than oral. Q material occurs scattered throughout Matthew 5–7; 10–11; 18:10, 23; and 24:37; but it is centralised in two sections of Luke (6:20–7:35; 9:57–13:34). Luke, therefore, probably more nearly preserves the original sequence of Q. The "Q" document, of course, is theoretical, since no copy of it is known to exist. It is likely, however, that a document preserving the sayings of Jesus and fitting the description of Q was known to the early church. The church father, Papias, writing about A.D. 130, records, "Matthew collected the oracles in the Hebrew language, and each interpreted them as best he could." It is unlikely that these "oracles" are our present Gospel of Matthew, though it may be that they served as a source for the Gospel of Matthew (and Luke?). The sayings of Jesus were highly esteemed in the early church, especially

for the instruction of converts; and it is possible that the more than 200 verses that Matthew and Luke have in common depend on a sayings source compiled by Matthew and known to Papias as “oracles.”

Special M and Special L. When Mark and Q are accounted for, there remain more than one-fifth of Matthew and one-third of Luke for which there is no parallel in other gospels. Where each writer obtained this information is uncertain, although much of Luke’s special material probably came from sources associated with his Pauline journeys, particularly in Caesarea. At any rate, each writer appears to have used unique materials in writing his gospel. These sources are sometimes labelled Special M (Matthew) and Special L (Luke).



4. The reliability of the gospels

In recent times it has become fashionable to re-date and re-explain the gospel records. For many the gospels are no longer seen as products of the first generation of believers, or their content viewed as an accurate biography. Essentially, they are seen as merely the kerygma (the preaching) of the later Christian community concerning Jesus. They are not understood as a true story of Jesus, but just what the early church community liked to believe and preach about Jesus.

Although this perspective still enjoys support from large sections of the more liberal theological world, there are millions of Bible-believing Christians who have good reason to accept the gospel account of the life of Jesus at face-value and as first century records.

For our own purposes it is sufficient to state that the gospel accounts appear to be reliable on the basis of the following at least:

- (i) the large numbers of eye-witnesses during the first generation of the early church would surely have functioned as a corrective to any speculative tales of Jesus;
- (ii) the rich Christology of the epistles is also not "read back" into the Gospel accounts. By this we mean that, in the gospels

Jesus consistently refers to himself as *Son of Man*, and never as *Son of God*. However, in the epistles He is never referred to as *Son of Man*, and very often as *Son of God*. It would have been very simple for the writers of the gospels to include the title Son of God in the gospels, but they did not - at least, not in the mouth of Jesus himself.

- (iii) the Gentiles are assigned a realistic place in the gospels - although written at a time when the message of Jesus was being preached to all nations, in the gospel accounts the Gentiles are rarely referred to at all.
- (iv) the story of the suffering and death of Jesus enjoys a position of primary emphasis in all four gospels.
- (v) and finally, the inclusion in the gospels of confusing statements (such as the second coming; Mark 9:1), or matters unimportant to the early church (little children; Mark 10:13–16), or even embarrassing remembrances (Peter's denial; Mark 14:66–68), indicate that the early church was more intent on preserving the tradition it received than on improving its own image.

5. *The prophetic symbolism of the gospel accounts*

Upon a closer study of the 4 recognised gospel accounts, the early church fathers noticed a distinct emphasis in each that corresponded to the prophetic insights of the Old Testament and more specifically to those of Ezekiel. From Ezekiel 1:10 they drew on 4 prophetic symbols and allocated one to each of the gospel accounts in order to represent the unique message concerning Christ presented in each particular gospel.

The symbols were allocated as follows:

| GOSPEL | SYMBOL | PRESENTS CHRIST AS |
|---------|--------|--------------------------------|
| MATTHEW | LION | KING; MESSIAH; ROYAL AUTHORITY |
| MARK | OX | SUFFERING SERVANT |
| LUKE | MAN | PERFECT HUMANITY |
| JOHN | EAGLE | GOD THE SON; DEITY |

B. The Gospel According to John

John has written a significant portion of the New Testament - one gospel, three epistles, and the book of Revelation. With Luke and Paul he is therefore a major contributor to what we know about Jesus Christ.

1. Author, purpose, readers and date of writing

The gospel itself witnesses to the authorship of the "disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 21:20,24). This disciple was one of those present at the last supper (21:20), and therefore one of the apostles.

The testimony of the late 2nd century was that this apostle was John. There is much agreement today that the internal testimony of the book points to an author who was:

- (i) a Jew;
- (ii) a Palestinian;
- (iii) an eyewitness and
- (iv) a disciple of Jesus.

There seems little reason therefore to doubt that the author was John.

John's purpose is given in 20:31 - that the reader might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing he might have life in his name. John's emphasis on belief in Jesus as the Christ (the Messiah, or Anointed One) is parallel to Paul's preaching objective in the synagogues of the Jewish Dispersion. This means that this gospel was probably aimed to be read primarily by non-Palestinian Jews (note John's use of the term "messiah" in 1:41, 4:25).

It was probably written from Ephesus, where John ended his life, sometime between 80 and 90 AD.

2. John's relationship to the other three gospels

There is a large measure of mutual coincidence between the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, in the way they arrange and tell the story of Jesus. However, 92% of John's material is unique in either content or form to himself. The differences between John and the other gospels can be summarised as follows:

- (i) John does not reflect the teaching of Jesus in parables. However, he does recount the allegories that Jesus used of himself, e.g. vine, shepherd, door, etc;
- (ii) only a few of Jesus' miracles and discourses are told by John, whereas the other gospels abound with narratives of the miraculous works of Jesus. John's method is to relate an episode, and then to comment upon it, either by relating a long discourse of Jesus himself, or by penning his own reflections on the matter;
- (iii) some major omissions in John are: the transfiguration of Jesus on the mountain, the events in Gethsemane, and the institution of the Communion;

- (iv) a major addition in John is the story of the resurrection of Lazarus;
- (v) whereas the other gospels portray Jesus consistently in terms of the Messiah as the Son of Man (in line with Daniel 7), John is more explicit that Jesus is the Son of God.

The question is why is there this sort of difference? The answer probably lies in both the time at which the fourth gospel was written - a generation later than the others - and the purpose of the gospel - to supplement and reflect on the implications of the other gospels.

3. *Characteristics*

What can we say about the special attributes of this book of the Bible?

- (i) The style is simple. It is written in very simple language, easy to understand.
- (ii) The thought is profound. Although the language is simple, the content is very deep.
- (iii) The gospel is constructed as
 - (a) prologue - 1:1-18;
 - (b) the body and
 - (c) the epilogue - chap 21.

The first section of the body of the work contains seven signs which Jesus performed. Most are followed by dialogue, discussion or controversy, or by teaching of Jesus, with John's own reflections interspersed. The final section of the body is the story of the suffering and death of Jesus and the resurrection stories.

Between the signs and this narrative lies the final teaching of Jesus to his disciples (chaps 13 - 16).

- (iv) There is emphasis on the feasts of the Jews. Three Passovers (2:3, 6:4 and 13:1) are indicated, a feast of tabernacles (7:2) and of dedication (10:22), and an unknown feast (5:1). These feasts show that the ministry of Jesus was longer than the other gospels appear to indicate.
- (v) This gospel shows clearly that Jesus moved continually between Galilee and Jerusalem, and that much of his ministry was in the Judean area. This is in contrast to the other gospels, which portray Jesus' ministry as primarily Galilean, while he travelled to Jerusalem only at the end, to suffer and die. However, there are hints in the synoptics of contact with the Jerusalem area, e.g. the reference to Mary and Martha in Luke 10:38-42.

- (vi) Jesus is not often depicted as addressing vast throngs. There is more emphasis on one-on-one encounters e.g. John 1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 20.
- (vii) The deity of the Son is emphasised. Two elements in particular distinguish John here from the other gospels. First, the teaching on the pre-existence of the Son (that Jesus existed as God before he became flesh), and second, the teaching on the logos - Jesus as the Word.
- (viii) Jesus' relationship to Judaism is emphasised. He is greater than the Torah (1:17), than the temple (2:19-21), than its glory (1:14), and than the feasts and their significance (7:37-39). He accepts worship as his rightful due (9:38 and 20:28).

4. *Theological content*

These are some of the principle theological concepts found in John:

- The relationship between the Father and the Son is emphasised. It is the most Trinitarian of the gospels. It reveals the necessity of accepting both the Father and the Son. To reject the one is to reject the other.
- Eschatology is both realised and future. Eternal life is to be both experienced and anticipated.
- The church is not referred to directly but is alluded to in allegories such as the vine and the flock.

5. *His deity revealed*

The deity of Christ is central to John's gospel account and is evident by the use of the number seven, often considered to be the biblical number of perfection and therefore of God.

- **The seven witnesses:**

John the Baptist (1:34) "This is the Son of God"
 Nathanael (1:49) "You are the Son of God"
 Peter (6:69) "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God"
 Martha (11:27) "You are the Christ the Son of God"
 Thomas (20:28) "My lord and my God"
 John (20:31) "Jesus is the Christ the Son of God"
 Christ himself (10:36) "I am the Son of God"

- **The seven miracles:**

Water into wine (2:1-11)
 Healing the nobleman's son (4:46-54)

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|-----------------------------|-----------|
| Healing the man at Bethesda | (5:1-47) |
| Feeding the 5000 | (6:1-14) |
| Walking on the water | (6:15-21) |
| Healing the blind man | (9:1-41) |
| Raising of Lazarus | (11:1-57) |

- **The seven “I am” sayings:**

| | |
|--------------------------------------|---------|
| I AM the bread of life | (6:35) |
| I AM the light of the world | (8:12) |
| Before Abraham was, I AM | (8:58) |
| I AM the good shepherd | (10:11) |
| I AM the resurrection and the life | (11:25) |
| I AM the way, the truth and the life | (14:6) |
| I AM the true vine | (15:1) |

6. *Outline of content*

- (i) Prologue 1:1-18
- (ii) Preparation (John the Baptist, and the first disciples)
1:19-51
- (iii) The signs and teaching 2:1-10:42
- (iv) Raising of Lazarus 11:1-57
- (v) Palm Sunday and the teaching in Jerusalem 12:1-50
- (vi) Teaching in the Upper room 13:1-16:33
- (vii) The suffering and crucifixion of Jesus 17:1-20:31
- (viii) Epilogue 21:1-25

Conclusion

John’s Gospel account is a wonderful presentation of Christ in His divine mystery and it encourages us toward personal faith in Him. Belief is one of the central themes in John - faith that leads to life eternal and life abundant, life as it can only be found in God through Jesus Christ.

Memory verse

2 Timothy 3:16 (NLT)

All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true
and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives.

It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right

Recommended Reading

Gordon D Fee & Douglas K Stuart. *How to Read the Bible Book by Book: A Guided Tour*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002).