Parallel Lives of Jesus

A Guide to the Four Gospels

Edward Adams

WJK Westminster John Knox Press
Louisville • Kentucky

Contents

Introduction

In their New Testament setting, the four Gospels stand under the singular heading "The Gospel" and are individuated, "According to Matthew," and so on. The Gospel titles are almost certainly not original, but they are ancient. No other titles are known for the Gospels. The titles were adopted into the canon and signal that the books to which they are attached exhibit commonality and individuality.

This is a guide to the four Gospels, or the Fourfold Gospel, that seeks to enable readers to engage with these texts in terms of their oneness and plurality. Although the canon draws attention to the commonality and individuality of the Gospels, it does not provide a method for negotiating these dimensions; finding and applying such a method belongs to the task of interpretation. Here I offer a model drawn from narratology (the study of narrative). Comparing them with multiple-narrative novels and films, I suggest that the four Gospels can profitably be read as four distinct yet overlapping narrative renditions of a shared story.

The main title of the book reflects the current scholarly consensus that the New Testament Gospels are a form of ancient biography; hence, in generic terms, they are "lives" of Jesus. Insofar as they are parallel accounts of Jesus' ministry, death, and resurrection, telling the same core story about the biographical subject, they may be called "parallel lives" of Jesus (to borrow the name given to the series of biographies written by Plutarch).

READING THE GOSPELS IN PARALLEL

The nature of the four canonical Gospels as parallel narratives of Jesus' life allows them to be read in close comparison. The layout of the Gospels in standard versions of the Bible is not conducive to a comparative reading of them, but a resource called a "synopsis" has been devised for this purpose. A synopsis sets out parallel Gospel passages side by side so that they can be "viewed together" (*syn* = with; *opsis* = view). The first three Gospels are especially amenable to this arrangement because they have so many passages in common; hence they are known as the "Synoptic Gospels." Many Gospel synopses have appeared since the first synopsis (produced by J. J. Griesbach) was published in 1776. Most concentrate on the Synoptic Gospels, but some, such as Kurt Aland's *Synopsis of the Four Gospels*, one of the best synopses currently available, include passages from John's Gospel as well.

Examining parallel Gospel passages with the aid of a synopsis is a core feature of formal Gospel study in universities, colleges, and seminaries. It is a great way of exploring the commonality and individuality of the Gospels. One can quickly spot similarities across matching passages and see where they differ. In the third part of this book, we look in close detail at selected parallel episodes found in three or all four Gospels. The parallel passages are laid out in parallel columns as in a synopsis. The shared story is delineated, and then we examine each Gospel version of that story by using a narrative-critical scheme of analysis. This narrative-critical approach to parallel analysis differs from the more common redaction-critical way of dealing with parallel Gospel passages (on redaction criticism, see chap. 1), which focuses on the editorial changes made by Gospel writers (usually Matthew and Luke) to their source text (usually Mark). Redaction criticism remains an indispensible tool for Gospel study, but the narrative-critical approach allows for comparison across a broader range of literary features.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

The book is divided into three parts. Part 1 is titled "Approaching the Four Gospels." Part 2 considers "The Individual Gospels and Their Narrative Features." Part 3 examines "Selected Parallel Episodes." The structure of the book reflects a progressive narrowing of the subject matter: from the Gospels generally, to the Gospels individually, to specific Gospel passages. The book is designed to be read from start to finish (though not in one sitting!), but readers can also use it as a book to dip into.

FOR FURTHER READING

The Fourfold Gospel

Burridge, Richard A. *Four Gospels, One Jesus?* 2nd ed. London: SPCK, 2005.
Childs, Brevard S. *The New Testament as Canon*. London: SMC Press, 1984.
Hengel, Martin. *The Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ*. London: SCM Press, 2000.
Hill, Charles E. *Who Chose the Gospels? Probing the Great Gospel Conspiracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
Stanton, Graham N. *Jesus and Gospel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
Strauss, Mark L. *Four Portraits, One Jesus: An Introduction to Jesus and the Gospels*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007.
Watson, Francis. "The Fourfold Gospel." In *The Cambridge Companion to the Gospels*, edited by S. C. Barton, 34–52. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Gospel Synopses

Aland, Kurt, ed. *Synopsis of the Four Gospels*. New York: American Bible Society, 1982.
Throckmorton, Burton H., Jr., ed. *Gospel Parallels: A Comparison of the Synoptic Gospels*. 5th ed. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1992.

Part 1

Approaching the Four Gospels

This first section provides introductory information about the Gospels and explains our model for reading them as four yet one. Chapter 1, "Grappling with the Gospels," first takes an initial look at the unity and individuality of the Gospels. We begin with the commonality, observing the common shape of the Gospels and the similar features of the Synoptic Gospels. Then we look at some of the differences, first between the Synoptic Gospels and John, and then between Matthew, Mark, and Luke. We discover that although the four Gospels exhibit shared characteristics, each asserts its individuality in particular ways. Attention then turns to introductory issues. How did the Gospels come to be written? Who wrote them? For whom were they written and for what purposes? Particular emphasis falls on the question, What are the Gospels? The reasons for viewing the Gospels as "lives" are specified, and we consider the interpretive implications of this generic classification.

Chapter 2, "Four Narratives, One Story," explains the distinction between "story" and "narrative" and shows its relevance to the unity and plurality of the Fourfold Gospel. The central story that the four Gospels manifest is set out and common narrative features are identified.

1

Grappling with the Gospels

The four Gospels look very alike.[1] All four are narratives of the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, the central figure of the Christian faith. All four concentrate on a particular phase of his life: the period of his public ministry culminating in his arrest, trial, death, and subsequent resurrection. Two of the four, Matthew's and Luke's Gospels, have birth stories, and Luke recounts an incident involving Jesus as a twelve-year-old boy; but the main narrative development in all four begins with his baptism by John the Baptist (though Jesus' baptism is alluded to rather than narrated in John's Gospel). All four report his miracles (especially his healings), his gathering of disciples, his attraction of public attention, his teaching, and his conflicts with the religious authorities; in each Gospel a disproportionate amount of attention is given to his last days. The four narratives parallel each other to a significant degree. They relate the same broad sweep of events and have numerous particular episodes in common (the feeding of the five thousand, the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the betrayal by Judas, the arrest of Jesus, Peter's denial, and so forth). The common shape of the four Gospels distinguishes them from other surviving "Gospels" from the early centuries of the Christian era.[2]

1. On the common characteristics of the four Gospels, see Loveday Alexander, "What Is a Gospel?" in *The Cambridge Companion to the Gospels*, ed. Stephen C. Barton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 13–33, here 14–17; Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003), 262–70.

2. It is possible that some apocryphal Gospels that are known only by name, or are extant in fragments, or are known only through quotations of them (such as the so-called Jewish Christian Gospels—the *Gospel of the Hebrews*, the *Gospel of the Nazarenes*, and the *Gospel of the Ebionites*) might have resembled the canonical Gospels more closely. But none of the extant works, stemming from the early centuries of the church, that are designated "gospels" either by themselves or by others, corresponds in literary shape to the four canonical Gospels.

THE SIMILARITY OF THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

The similarity of Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—is especially striking. These Gospels follow the same general narrative progression: preliminaries to Jesus' mission; ministry in Galilee; journey to Jerusalem; arrest, trial, crucifixion, and resurrection. They share many specific episodes. Shared textual units or "pericopae" (the singular is "pericope"; from *peri* + *coptō*, meaning "cut around") include the following:

John the Baptist's ministry
Jesus' baptism
The temptation of Jesus
The healing of Peter's mother-in-law
The healing of a paralyzed man
The call of Matthew/Levi
The healing of a man with a withered hand
The parable of the Sower and its interpretation
The feeding of the five thousand
Peter's confession
The first prediction of the passion
The transfiguration
The healing of an epileptic boy
Jesus' encounter with the rich, young ruler
The triumphal entry into Jerusalem
The cleansing of the temple
The prediction of the temple's destruction
The "eschatological" discourse
The preparation for the Passover
The Lord's Supper
Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane
The arrest of Jesus
Peter's denial of Jesus
Jesus' appearance before Pilate

All these pericopae occur in exactly this order in all three Gospel narratives, though with varying intervening material. The wording used in parallel passages is often very close, as can be seen from the call of Levi/Matthew, set out in parallel (synoptically, viewed together), below.

Matthew 9:9	Mark 2:14	Luke 5:27–28
As Jesus was walking along,	As he was walking along,	After this he went out
he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth;	he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth,	and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth;
and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up	and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up	and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up, left everything,
and followed him.	and followed him.	and followed him.

The Gospel writers, or "evangelists" (from the Greek [Gk.] *euangelion* = *eu* + *angelion*, "good news," often translated as "gospel"), narrate this incident in similar terms, with only slight verbal differences. Additionally, the Synoptic Gospels give the same broad account of Jesus' activities: proclaiming the kingdom of God, teaching the disciples, speaking in parables, sharing in table, fellowship with "tax collectors and sinners," healing the sick, casting out demons.

The similarity of the Synoptic Gospels, especially the agreements in order and wording, points to a literary relationship. The most widely accepted account of that relationship is that Mark's Gospel served as the main source for the other two. This is the theory of Markan Priority, which is the bedrock of modern scholarly study of the Synoptic Gospels.[3] The theory of Markan Priority relates to the "triple tradition," which is material common to all three Synoptic Gospels.[4]

There is another body of parallel material called the "double tradition": pericopae common to Matthew and Luke but absent from Mark, which consist mainly of teachings of Jesus. On the majority view, the double tradition is a source used independently by Matthew and Luke.[5] The alleged shared

3. On the arguments for Markan priority, see Mark Goodacre, *The Synoptic Problem: A Way through the Maze* (London: T&T Clark International, 2001), 56–83; Robert H. Stein, *The Synoptic Problem: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), 45–88. A minority of scholars hold to the priority of Matthew. Delbert Royce Burkett (*Rethinking the Gospel Sources: From Proto-Mark to Mark* [New York and London: T&T Clark International, 2004]) has recently argued for a more complex solution to the Synoptic Problem involving an early version of Mark that was known in different forms.

4. There are also passages shared between Mark and *one* of the other two, which many scholars include within the triple tradition. Goodacre (*Synoptic Problem*, 48–50) treats this material separately as "Not Quite Triple Tradition."

5. Stein, *Synoptic Problem*, 89–112.

source is normally regarded as written, though some conjecture that it is a collection of oral traditions or a mixture of oral traditions and written material. The hypothetical source has come to be known as Q (an abbreviation of the German word *Quelle*, "source").

Markan Priority and Q together form the two-source hypothesis, the most popular solution to the Synoptic Problem (the problem of how the Synoptic Gospels relate to each other). In recent years, an alternative to the two-source hypothesis has been growing in strength and accepts the priority of Mark but explains the double tradition in terms of Luke's direct use of Matthew.[6]

THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF JOHN'S GOSPEL

The likeness of the Synoptic Gospels to each other distinguishes them from the Gospel of John. The Synoptics describe a ministry conducted chiefly in Galilee, followed by a single, fatal visit to Jerusalem around the time of the festival of Passover.[7] In the Fourth Gospel, Jesus' ministry is set for the most part in Judea; he makes several trips to Jerusalem at festival times (2:13; 5:1; 7:10; 10:22; 12:12).

While John's narrative broadly parallels the Synoptic narratives, many specific events reported in the Synoptic Gospels are absent. Of the twenty-four pericopae listed above, John includes seven: ministry of John the Baptist, feeding of the five thousand, triumphal entry, cleansing of the temple, arrest, Peter's denial, appearance before Pilate. He alludes to Jesus' baptism but does not directly describe it, mentioning only the descent of the Spirit that accompanies it (see further chap. 5). Also, he narrates a cleansing of the temple at the beginning of Jesus' ministry rather than at the end, where it occurs in the Synoptics. John's version of common episodes is often quite different from the Synoptic accounts. For example, John gives a more extensive report of Jesus' trial before Pilate (John 18:28–19:16), which includes a dialogue between the two characters.

In John's Gospel the nonappearance of so many events that are integral to the Synoptic narration of Jesus' ministry is surprising. The absence of the Lord's Supper is especially noteworthy. Like the Synoptists, John narrates

6. This is known as the "Farrer theory," named after Austin Farrer, who first proposed it. See Austin Farrer, "On Dispensing with Q," in *Studies in the Gospels: Essays in Memory of R. H. Lightfoot*, ed. D. E. Nineham (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1955), 55–88. The Farrer view is championed in current scholarship by Mark Goodacre. For a critique of Q and a corresponding interpretation of the double tradition in terms of Luke's use of Matthew, see Goodacre, *Synoptic Problem*, 122–61.

7. In Luke, Jesus attends the Passover festival in Jerusalem as a boy (2:41–42), and in Matthew 4:5 and Luke 4:9, the devil takes Jesus to Jerusalem during the temptation.

Jesus' final meal with his disciples, at which Jesus predicts Judas's betrayal and Peter's denial, but there is no reference to words of institution said over the bread and wine. Instead, he describes Jesus' washing the disciples' feet (an incident exclusive to this Gospel).

Conversely, John includes in his narrative numerous well-known incidents that are entirely unique to this Gospel, including these:

The miracle of changing water into wine (2:1–11)
The conversation with Nicodemus (3:1–21)
The meeting with the Samaritan woman (4:1–42)
The healing of a lame man at the pool of Bethesda (5:1–15)
The healing of the man born blind (chap. 9)
The raising of Lazarus (11:1–44)
Jesus' washing the disciples' feet (13:1–17)
The Farewell Discourses (chaps. 14–16)
The high-priestly prayer (chap. 17)
Jesus' special resurrection appearance to Mary Magdalene (20:11–18)
Jesus' appearance to Thomas (20:24–29)

The contours of Jesus' ministry in John's Gospel are broadly the same as in the Synoptics, but curiously, there are no exorcisms (i.e., expulsions of demons from individuals). Also, Jesus doesn't speak much about the kingdom of God (the actual phrase occurs only twice in the Gospel). Instead, he talks a lot about "eternal life." Moreover, he doesn't teach in parables, as is his custom in the Synoptics. Rather, he employs symbolism: "I am the bread of life," and so forth.

The differences between John and the Synoptics raise the question of how this Gospel relates to them. Does John write with knowledge of any of the Synoptics, or in complete independence of them? Until the twentieth century, it was generally accepted that John wrote to supplement the other three Gospels. Around the middle of the twentieth century, scholarly opinion changed, leading to the dominant view that John wrote independently of the Synoptics.[8] On this theory, pericopae that John shares with the Synoptics stem from mutual reliance on common oral traditions. In more recent years, the view has been gaining ground that John knew, but was not literally dependent on, at least one of the Synoptics: the Gospel of Mark.[9] This view seems to make best sense of the evidence. On the one

8. Influential was the work of Percival Gardner-Smith in *Saint John and the Synoptic Gospels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938).

9. See Richard Bauckham, "John for Readers of Mark," in *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 147–71.

hand, it is clear that John has not "copied" from Mark in the way that Matthew and Luke seem to have done. On the other hand, structural similarities and occasional small but striking verbal coincidences between John and Mark in parallel passages (e.g., the unusual Gk. *pistikos*, "pure" or "genuine," in John 12:3 and Mark 14:3)[10] suggest that the former was familiar with the latter.

DISTINGUISHING FEATURES OF THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

Despite their close similarity, the Synoptic Gospels are by no means identical. Although the basic narrative pattern is the same, there are obvious differences between them, especially at the beginning and end of the Gospels.

Beginnings: Matthew begins with a genealogy, tracing Jesus' ancestry back to Abraham through King David. Luke also opens with a birth narrative, but it differs markedly from Matthew's. Matthew's birth narrative is focused on Joseph. Luke's version concentrates on Mary. In contrast to both Matthew and Luke, Mark has no birth narrative. Mark's starting point is the ministry of John the Baptist. He gives no account of Jesus' origins. Jesus makes his first appearance in this Gospel at the scene of his baptism.

Endings: Mark's Gospel ends rather oddly, with the women's fleeing from the empty tomb and saying nothing to anyone (16:8).[11] Jesus makes no postresurrection appearances. Both Matthew and Luke narrate appearances of the risen Jesus, but their appearance stories differ. Matthew narrates a manifestation of Jesus to the women who visit the tomb (28:8–10) and then to the disciples on a mountain in Galilee, where Jesus gives the Great Commission (28:16–20). Luke tells of Jesus' appearance to two disciples on the road to Emmaus (24:13–35) and then to the disciples in Jerusalem (24:36–49). The disciples witness Jesus' ascent into heaven from the vicinity of Bethany and joyously return to Jerusalem (24:50–53).

Although the Synoptics have many individual pericopae in common, each one has unique material. About three hundred verses of Matthew have no parallel in either Mark or Luke. Matthew's unique contents, often labeled M, include the following pericopae:

10. Noted by Judith Lieu, "How John Writes," in *The Written Gospel*, ed. Marcus Bockmuehl and Donald A. Hagner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 182 n. 20.

11. The oldest and most reliable written copies of the Gospel of Mark end at 16:8. Later manuscripts provide two alternate endings, which describe Jesus' postresurrection appearances, but most scholars do not think this extra material is original to the Gospel. The ending of Mark will be discussed in chap. 3 below.

The annunciation to Joseph (1:18–25)
The visit of the Magi (2:1–12)
The flight to Egypt (2:13–15)
The slaughter of the innocents (2:16–18)
The parable of the Wheat and the Tares (13:24–30, 36–43)
The parable of the Pearl of Great Price (13:45–46)
The coin in the fish's mouth (17:24–27)
The parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard (20:1–16)
The parable of the Wise and Foolish Maidens (25:1–13)
The parable of the Sheep and the Goats (25:31–46)
Judas's remorse and suicide (27:3–10)
Pilate's wife's dream (27:19)
The bribing of the guards (28:11–15)
The Great Commission (28:16–20)

It is only in Matthew's Gospel that we find the Sermon on the Mount (chaps. 5–7), probably the most well-known teaching of Jesus. However, many of the sayings that contribute to this discourse can also be found in Luke's Gospel (especially in Luke's so-called Sermon on the Plain, Luke 6:20–49) and so belong to the double tradition.

Mark's Gospel has relatively little unique material because nearly all of its contents are paralleled in Matthew or Luke, and frequently both (the substance of 606 out of the 661 verses of Mark is reproduced in Matthew, and some 380 of the 661 verses of Mark reappear in Luke). Mark's distinctive material includes the following pericopae:

Jesus thought to be out of his mind (3:20–21)
The healing of the deaf and mute man (7:32–37)
The healing of the blind man near Bethsaida (8:22–26)
The young man who flees after Jesus' arrest (14:51–52)

These passages are peculiar in both senses of the word: they belong exclusively to this Gospel, and they have somewhat unusual features. In 3:20–21, Jesus is regarded as mad, and his own family tries to seize him. In 7:32–37, Jesus' method of healing involves an unusual degree of physical contact (he puts his fingers into the man's ears, spits, and touches his tongue). In 8:22–26, Jesus heals in two stages. At the first touch, the blind man's sight is partially restored; after the second touch, he sees everything clearly. In 14:51–52, a naked young man makes a cameo appearance. The nature of Mark's exclusive content fits with Markan priority (over against the view that Mark was dependent on Matthew and Luke): one can more readily imagine Matthew and Luke dropping these potentially embarrassing passages than Mark deliberately including them while discarding material such as the Sermon on the Mount.

The material exclusive to Luke, sometimes labeled L, comprises about one-third of the Gospel's entire contents and accounts for some of its most distinctive features. Some of the most memorable stories from the Gospels belong to Luke's special material, including these:

The annunciation to Mary (1:26–38)
The story of the shepherds (2:8–20)
Jesus as a boy in the temple (2:41–52)
The raising of the widow's son at Nain (7:11–17)
The parable of the Good Samaritan (10:30–37)
The parable of the Rich Fool (12:13–21)
The parable of the Lost Coin (15:8–10)
The parable of the Prodigal Son and the Elder Brother (15:11–32)
The parable of the Unjust Steward (16:1–13)
The parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (16:19–31)
The cleansing of ten lepers (17:11–19)
The story of Zacchaeus (19:1–10)
Jesus' postresurrection appearance to two disciples on the way to Emmaus (24:13–35)
The ascension of Jesus into heaven (24:50–53)

Although the order in which shared stories are narrated is often the same across the Synoptics, there are some differences in the placement of episodes. Jesus' rejection at Nazareth, for example, comes at a much earlier point in Luke's Gospel (4:16–30) than in Matthew (13:53–58) and Mark (6:1–6a). Also, the question about fasting comes later in Matthew (9:14–17) than in Mark (2:18–22) and Luke (5:33–39).

Parallel passages are hardly ever 100 percent identical, and the variations are often significant. In the example given earlier (Matt. 9:9; Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27–28), the three accounts differ on the name of the individual called: "Matthew" in Matthew's Gospel, but "Levi" in Mark and Luke. This is clearly a significant difference! The traditional explanation is that this person had two names and that Matthew gives one name, while Mark and Luke give the other.[12] The fact that only Matthew names this individual "Matthew" is taken by some as support for the view that the apostle Matthew wrote this Gospel. Luke alone comments that Levi "left everything" to follow Jesus. A similar remark is made in Luke 5:11, in connection with the call of Peter, James, and John. Luke places particular emphasis on renunciation of possessions as a condition of discipleship (cf. 14:33, a saying found only in Luke's Gospel). Also, Luke specifies that Levi was a tax collector (a specification we find later in Matthew's Gospel: 10:3).

12. This explanation is not widely accepted in critical scholarship. For a recent discussion of the issue, see Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006), 108–12.

This coheres with Luke's particular interest in Jesus' sympathy for tax collectors (Luke 18:9–14; 19:1–10). On the assumption that Matthew and Luke use Mark as a literary resource, scholars usually see their variations from Mark's text in parallel pericopae as intentional changes to it (see on redaction criticism below).

Although the Synoptists agree in the range of activities that characterize Jesus' ministry, they differ in the emphasis they place on these activities. Matthew gives structural prominence to Jesus' teaching. Mark emphasizes Jesus' miracles. Luke gives particular attention to Jesus' practice of eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners.

The Synoptic Gospels, then, do not simply repeat each other; at every level they display interesting and important differences.

FOUR INDIVIDUAL GOSPELS

To sum up so far: The Gospels exhibit a significant degree of commonality. Yet each Gospel has particularities that set it apart from the others. John's Gospel is the most distinct, but each of the four distinguishes itself from the others in certain ways.

Matthew's Gospel is the most *Jewish* of the four and the one that is most clearly oriented toward the Old Testament. Matthew portrays Jesus as "Son of David" and indicates that Jesus has come to fulfill the Law and the Prophets. Matthew exhibits a particular awareness of traditional Jewish practices: almsgiving (Matt. 6:1–4), tithing (23:23), fasting (6:16–18), and the wearing of phylacteries (23:5). He not only shows more interest in the Jewish law than do the other Gospel writers; in the Sermon on the Mount he also records sayings of Jesus that add extra rigor to the Law (Matt. 5–7). Although the language of fulfillment is common to all, this Gospel contains more Old Testament quotations than any of the others. Matthew has about sixty direct citations of the Old Testament and countless allusions and references to it. Matthew's Gospel forms a bridge between the two Testaments, expressing continuity and newness. It is appropriate, then, that it is the first in the canonical order. This Gospel is also the most *organized* of the four, with Jesus' teaching concentrated into five main blocks (chaps. 5–7; 10; 13; 18; 24–25), like the five books of the Torah. Matthew's Gospel was the most popular Gospel in the early Christian centuries. It was cited more frequently than any of the others. At the end of the fourth century, commentaries written on this Gospel far outnumbered those on the other three Gospels.[13]

13. David C. Sim, "The Rise and Fall of the Gospel of Matthew," *Expository Times* 120 (July 2009): 478–85, here 479.

Mark's Gospel is the most *action packed* of the four Gospels, with much more space given to the deeds of Jesus than to his words. This Gospel has proportionally more miracles than any of the other Gospels: Mark records eighteen specific miracles performed by Jesus. Mark's is the Gospel that most readily lends itself to dramatic performance (all the Gospels were probably originally designed to be read aloud in gatherings for worship since most people were illiterate). The Gospel of Mark can be read aloud or told in about two hours. Those who have witnessed theatrical recitations of Mark (sometimes involving only one actor) can testify to its dramatic impact. It is also the *shortest* of the four Gospels, at around 11,242 words (Matthew is around 18,305 words; Luke, 19,428; John, 15,416).[14]

Luke's Gospel is the most *socially oriented* of the four, laying special emphasis on Jesus' concern for the poor, the disadvantaged, and those on the edges of society. Luke's Gospel contains a significant amount of material on poverty and wealth. Luke gives particular attention to Jesus' contacts with women and highlights, as no other Gospel writer does, the role that women play in Jesus' ministry. Women figure more prominently in this Gospel than in any of the others (especially in Luke 1–2). On one estimate, Luke refers to thirteen women not mentioned in the other two Gospels.[15] The social orientation of Luke's Gospel makes it particularly attractive to modern readers. Luke's Gospel is the basis for the most widely viewed movie depiction of the life of Jesus. Released in 1979, the film *Jesus* has been seen by several billion people worldwide and has been translated into over a thousand languages.[16] Luke's Gospel is also the only one of the four to have a sequel in the New Testament: the book of Acts. Luke is the *longest* of the four Gospels, nearly twice the length of Mark. Luke's Gospel and the book of Acts are the two lengthiest writings in the entire New Testament and together account for nearly one-quarter of it.

John's Gospel is simultaneously the *simplest* and *most profound* Gospel. It has been described as "a stream in which children can wade and elephants swim."[17] Its plainness and clarity make it accessible to new readers, and its depth continually challenges and stimulates those who know it well. It is the most *evangelistic* of the four Gospels (even if it was not written with evangelistic intent), with statements such the well-known saying in John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who

14. Robert Morgenthaler, *Statistik des neutestamentlichen Wortschatzes* (Zurich and Frankfurt: Gotthelf-Verlag, 1958), 164; cf. Richard A. Burridge, *What Are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 199, 225. An exact word count cannot be given because of variations among the manuscripts.

15. Mark L. Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus: An Introduction to Jesus and the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 287.

16. See http://www.jesusfilm.org.

17. Graham N. Stanton, *The Gospels and Jesus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 102.

believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." And it is the most *theologically rich* of the four, with its deeper exploration of certain subjects such as the relationship between Jesus and God the Father. Although Matthew's Gospel was the most favored Gospel in the ancient church, John's Gospel has been the most popular and most studied Gospel for most of the church's history. A preference for it has been expressed by some of the church's greatest theologians, including Augustine and Martin Luther.[18]

The four Gospels have traditionally been symbolized by different creaturely images: Matthew as a human being; Mark as a lion; Luke as an ox; John as an eagle.[19] These images appear in paintings, church architecture, and illuminated Gospels, such as the Lindisfarne Gospels and the Book of Kells.[20] The application of these symbols (drawn from Ezek. 1 and Rev. 1) to the four Gospels acknowledges the individuality of each one.

THE FORMATION OF THE GOSPELS

How did the Gospels come to be written? According to the standard scholarly reconstruction, the process of formation ran as follows. At first some sayings of Jesus and stories about him were transmitted orally. Then this material began to be put into written form. Finally, the evangelists took the oral and written sources at their disposal and produced their Gospels. The final phase, the actual writing of the Gospels, is generally dated to the period 65–100 CE. Early church tradition dates Mark's Gospel soon after Peter's death in Rome, assumed to be around 65 CE. Modern scholars tend to place it around 70 CE, either just before or just after the destruction of Jerusalem.[21] Matthew and Luke's Gospels tend to be dated in the 80s and John's Gospel around 95 CE.

The three-stage scheme is hypothetical; yet in his Gospel prologue (1:1–4), Luke seems to acknowledge such a process when he refers to "eyewitnesses and servants of the word" who "handed on" Jesus material (oral transmission), the "many" attempts to commit the gospel events to writing (the formation of written sources), and his own efforts in "investigating everything carefully" so as to produce his own "orderly account" (the composition of the Gospels).

18. Cf. Francis Watson, "The Fourfold Gospel," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Gospels*, ed. Stephen C. Barton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 34–52, here 39.

19. Irenaeus, the first church father to employ these images, applies the lion to John and the eagle to Mark (*Against Heresies* 3.11.8–9). The traditional allocation of the symbols stems from Jerome. See further Richard A. Burridge, *Four Gospels, One Jesus?* (London: SPCK, 1994), 23–27.

20. Burridge, *Four Gospels*, 29–31.

21. Recently, though, a date as early as the mid-40s has been proposed: see James G. Crossley, *The Date of Mark's Gospel: Insights from the Law in Earliest Christianity*, JSNTSup 266 (London: T&T Clark International, 2005).

The three main historical methods of Gospel criticism—form, source, and redaction criticism—investigate each stage in the process of formation.[22] *Form criticism* is concerned with the oral stage; it isolates the individual pericopae of the (mainly Synoptic) Gospels and analyzes them by their *forms* (miracle stories, pronouncement stories, parables, et al.), assigning each form to a distinct life setting in the early church (miracle stories to apologetic contexts, pronouncement stories to popular preaching, parables to storytelling scenarios, et al.). *Source criticism* tries to delineate the literary sources used by the evangelists in the production of their Gospels. As we have seen, the majority view of Synoptic sources is that Matthew and Luke independently used Mark and the hypothetical Q. *Redaction criticism* ("redaction" refers to the process of editing for publication) looks at how the evangelists edited the written and oral sources available to them to produce the Gospels as we have them. Attention is given to the changes the evangelists make to their sources (especially additions, omissions, and alterations). Analysis of these changes is used to determine the Gospel writers' particular theological tendencies.

The three stages through which it is posited that the Gospels came to be—the oral phase, the period of written sources, the composition of the Gospels themselves—most likely overlapped. This second and third stages would certainly have coincided in the case of Mark's Gospel if, as most agree, it was used as a literary source by Matthew and Luke. It is also likely that some written material was in circulation during the oral period. Indeed, it is quite possible, as Graham Stanton has argued, that disciples of Jesus recorded in writing some of his words and deeds during the period of his ministry.[23]

AUTHORSHIP, AUDIENCES, AND AIMS

Authorship

Who wrote the Gospels? The four Gospels are traditionally assigned to Matthew, the tax collector and disciple (Matt. 9:9); Mark, the travel companion of Paul (Col. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:11) and associate of Peter (1 Pet. 5:13); Luke, physician and coworker with Paul (Col. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:11); and John, the son of Zebedee (Mark 1:29; 3:17). However, none of the Gospels names its actual author. As we have noted, the Gospel titles with their attributions of authorship were almost certainly added later.[24] Strictly speaking, the Gospels are anonymous!

22. Cf. Strauss, *Four Portraits*, 46.

23. Graham N. Stanton, *Jesus and Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 188–89.

24. Martin Hengel (*The Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ* [Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000]), however, has recently argued that the titles are early and reliable.

Critical scholarship has generally doubted the traditional attributions. Even so, there are many good scholars who cautiously accept them—on the basis of strong external testimony in the case of the first three Gospels (the early church fathers are totally unanimous in assigning the first three Gospels to Matthew, Mark, and Luke; one might have expected some variation in patristic opinion if the attributions were educated guesses),[25] and on a mixture of external and internal evidence in the case of the Fourth Gospel.[26] The internal evidence for John the apostle's authorship of the Fourth Gospel relates to the beloved disciple ("the disciple whom Jesus loved"; 21:20), who is apparently set forth as the author in 21:24 ("This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and has written them"). It is argued that John the son of Zebedee best fits the profile of this anonymous figure. However, the evidence relating to the beloved disciple is by no means straightforward. Other identifications have been proposed (e.g., Lazarus, Thomas), and it is not clear that John 21:24 is saying that the beloved disciple is the actual writer of the Gospel. Assuming that the phrase "these things" refers to the Gospel as a whole (rather than just to chap. 21), "has written them" could be interpreted to mean that the Gospel derives from the beloved disciple's oral or written testimony (taking the underlying Gk. in the sense of "has *caused* them to be written"; cf. 19:22) rather than his composition; another/others could have taken this testimony and from it composed the Gospel.[27] Many scholars think that the Gospel of John, at least in its final form, was the product not of a single writer but of a group.[28] This view receives some support from the "we" of 21:24 ("We know that his [the beloved disciple's] testimony is true").

In terms of the interpretation of the Gospels, little depends on knowing the exact identity of their authors. This book follows the established practice in Gospel scholarship of referring to the Gospel authors by their traditional names.

Audiences

For whom were the Gospels written? It is generally accepted that all four Gospels were originally written for Christians rather than nonbelievers. In

25. These three, it is pointed out, are marginal figures in the NT, none of them an obvious choice as an authoritative witness, and one of them, Mark, with a less than stellar record (cf. Acts 15:38–39).

26. The external evidence is less clear-cut in the case of the Fourth Gospel. The early church father Papias (ca. 130 CE), in a quotation preserved by Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.3–4), mentions "the elder John." Some scholars have concluded that the Gospel should be assigned to this figure (most recently, Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 412–37). But it is debated whether John the elder is to be distinguished from or identified with John the apostle.

27. But see the arguments against this in Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 358–62.

28. On this view, the Gospel was written in stages.

the second half of the twentieth century, the prevailing view was that the Gospels were written for specific Christian communities, fairly narrowly conceived. Hence, scholars would speak of "the Matthean community," "the Markan community," and so forth, and various attempts were made to give definition to these communities.[29] Richard Bauckham challenged the consensus in an important essay published in 1998, arguing that from the outset the Gospels were meant to circulate widely in the early church.[30] Some have endorsed Bauckham's thesis; others have reacted strongly against it. Margaret Mitchell, for example, points out that Bauckham's claim runs counter to early church traditions associating each Gospel with a particular Mediterranean locale: Mark with Rome and/or Alexandria, Matthew with Judea, Luke with Achaia, John with Ephesus and/or Patmos.[31] The debate is ongoing; a mediating view suggests that the Gospels were written both for specific believing audiences and with a view to circulation within a wide Christian readership.

Aims

Why were the Gospels written? The impetus to write down Jesus' sayings and activities, as noted above, was likely present from an early stage. The production of written Gospels was probably not, therefore, a big-bang moment in the early church but the extension of a process perhaps already under way during Jesus' ministry (though the turn to the biographical genre, on which see below, was a distinctly new development in the process).

In the writing of the Gospels, an important factor was probably the desire to preserve the memory of Jesus. On the conventional dating, the penning of the Gospels coincides with the passing away of the first Christian generation. It is just at this point, as Jesus was fast receding from living memory, that a permanent record of his activities and teachings would have become necessary.[32]

Beyond this general motivation, the evangelists had their own individual reasons for writing. The Gospel writers' individual purposes may be partly deduced from the specific contents of their books and their particular theological emphases. Thus Matthew probably wrote at least in part to show that Jesus is the fulfillment of Old Testament and Jewish expectations. Luke and John

29. See Raymond E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979).

30. Richard Bauckham, "For Whom Were Gospels Written?" in *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 9–48.

31. Margaret M. Mitchell, "Patristic Counter-Evidence to the Claim That 'The Gospels Were Written for All Christians,'" *New Testament Studies* 51 (2005): 36–79.

32. Cf. Arthur G. Patzia, *The Making of the New Testament: Origin, Collection, Text and Canon* (Leicester: Apollos, 1995), 47.

offer explicit statements of purpose. In the final clause of his preface (Luke 1:1–4, addressed to a certain Theophilus), Luke declares that he has decided to write the Gospel "so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed." John appears to supply an evangelistic motive for the writing of his Gospel: "These are written so that you *may come to believe* that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God" (20:31; italics mine). But as the NRSV notes indicate, other manuscripts read "*may continue to believe*." It is probably better to interpret the purpose statement of 20:31 in terms of sustaining and enhancing *existing* faith rather than creating new faith, since the Gospel as a whole seems to presume a believing audience. One may still recognize the evangelistic appeal of the Gospel (as indicated above).

WHAT ARE THE GOSPELS?

We have not yet addressed the question, What kind of texts are the Gospels? To what genre do they belong? A genre is a specific category or type of literature, such as romance, science fiction, or detective story. Knowing the genre of a piece of literature can make a difference in the way we interpret and react to it. We will respond rather differently to the report of some heinous crime when we read it in a detective novel than when we read it in a newspaper.

The Gospels as Gospels

The four narrative texts with which we are concerned are universally called "Gospels." The four are also often referred to collectively as "the Fourfold Gospel." However, "Gospel" was not a preexisting literary type, a ready-made mold into which the evangelists could pour their material. There are no examples of earlier works, either Jewish or Greco-Roman, called "Gospels." Moreover, none of the four Gospels explicitly calls itself a "Gospel." As we have noted, it is virtually certain that the traditional titles, "The Gospel according to Matthew," and so forth, were applied to the Gospels after they were written.[33] Mark uses the word "gospel," *euangelion* (lit., "good news"), in his opening verse. The precise meaning of this line is debated, but it is commonly agreed that *euangelion* is not being used as a genre indicator. Very quickly, though, the classification "Gospel" became established. Certainly in the second half of the second century, the four were being called "Gospels." Justin, in his *First Apology*, written around 160 CE, speaks of the memoirs of

33. Some manuscripts simply have "According to Matthew," etc., i.e., without a preceding "The Gospel."

the apostles, "which are called Gospels" (66.3).[34] The word "Gospel" also is applied to writings other than the four canonical Gospels (e.g., the *Gospel of the Hebrews*, *Gospel of the Nazarenes*, *Gospel of the Ebionites*, et al.).

The word *euangelion* is used throughout the New Testament for the oral preaching of "good news." The apostle Paul, whose writings are the earliest in the New Testament, uses the word for the proclamation of salvation, focusing on the death and resurrection of Jesus (e.g., Rom. 1:1, 9, 16; 10:16). Beyond the opening sentence of his composition, Mark uses the term *euangelion* for the good news proclaimed by Jesus—that the kingdom of God has drawn near (Mark 1:14–15)—and for the good news preached subsequently by Jesus' followers (13:10; 14:9). Matthew qualifies the gospel announced by Jesus and others as "good news of the kingdom" (Matt. 4:23; 9:35; 24:14). In the book of Acts, the term is used of the apostles' preaching (Acts 15:7; 20:24).

The New Testament use of the word *euangelion* for the oral proclamation of salvation was probably influenced by the use of the related verb *euangelizomai*, meaning to "bring good news," in the Septuagint (the Gk. translation of the Old Testament, the standard abbreviation for which is LXX).[35] In Isaiah 52:7, the prophet states, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation. . . ." In Isaiah 61:1, the speaker proclaims, "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed." In Luke 4:16–21, Jesus is depicted as reading this Scripture and applying it to himself (see further in chap. 5). The verb is used by Paul (e.g., Rom. 1:15; 10:15; 15:20), and it occurs with some frequency in Luke's Gospel and the book of Acts (e.g., Luke 1:19; 2:10; 3:18; Acts 5:42; 8:4).

The word *euangelion* figured in Roman imperial propaganda, though it is almost always used in the plural, whereas in the New Testament, it always occurs in the singular. The famous Priene Inscription heralds the birthday of Augustus as "the beginning of good news for the world."[36] The formulation is a striking parallel to Mark 1:1: "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ." Some scholars think that Mark may be deliberately contrasting the gospel of Jesus Christ with the good tidings associated with Augustus and his successors.[37]

Mark's opening sentence was probably the catalyst for the subsequent application of the term "Gospel" to his own work and other written narratives

34. This is the first example of the plural *euangelia* being used for written Gospels. Ignatius, ca. 110 CE, refers several times to "the Gospel" (e.g., *Smyrn.* 5.1; 7.2) in a way suggesting that a written work, most likely Matthew's Gospel, is in view. See further Stanton, *Jesus and Gospel*, 53–55.

35. The singular noun *euangelion* is absent from the Septuagint.

36. Stanton, *Jesus and Gospel*, 32.

37. See, e.g., Adam Winn, *The Purpose of Mark's Gospel: An Early Christian Response to Roman Imperial Propaganda* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 98.

about Jesus. Although Mark does not use the term as a literary classification, he makes it possible for such a move to be made. The nomenclature is appropriate to the four canonical Gospels since, as we will see in the next chapter, the core story embodied in them corresponds to what was probably a common pattern of early "gospel" preaching.

The Gospels as Lives of Jesus

If the evangelists did not knowingly write "Gospels," what kind of works did they think they were writing? In the nineteenth century, it was common to view the Gospels as biographies. During this period many writers used the Gospels as resources for penning their own "lives of Jesus," in which they endeavored to trace Jesus' psychological development. However, in the 1920s opinion began to shift under the influence of scholars like Karl Ludwig Schmidt and Rudolf Bultmann, who argued that the Gospels are low-grade collections of stories and sayings passed on orally over a period of time. In terms of genre, the Gospels were regarded as sui generis, unlike any other type of writing in ancient literature, totally without antecedent. But new forms of literature generally do not materialize "out of nothing"; rather, they emerge as adaptations of existing literary types. Even if the evangelists were creating a new kind of writing, common literary practice would dictate that they would have looked to existing models to guide them in their composition. In more recent years, there has been a revival of the view that the Gospels belong to the ancient biographical genre. The research of Richard Burridge has been pivotal in this respect, helping to create what amounts to a new consensus within scholarship on the Gospels.

Clearly the Gospels are not biographies in the modern sense. Far too much of the life of Jesus is missing for modern appetites, and too many personal details are left out, such as his likes and dislikes, what he looked like, his early life and experiences, his personality, and so forth. Matthew and Luke have birth and infancy narratives, but the main story really begins with Jesus' embarkation on his public ministry, which according to Luke (3:23) occurred when Jesus was "about thirty years old." Many celebrities (actors, models, sports stars) have already penned their "life story" by the age of thirty! The evangelists do not try to explore Jesus' inner development, nor do they give attention to the social and circumstantial factors that influenced and shaped him. But if the Gospels of the New Testament do not conform to expectations for modern biographies, they do compare well, as Burridge has shown, with ancient biographies, such as Tacitus's *Agricola* and Plutarch's *Parallel Lives of Greeks and Romans*.[38]

38. Burridge, *What Are the Gospels?* 154–90.

First, they are of similar length to Greco-Roman biographies. Ancient biographies, or "lives"(Gk. *bioi*), are medium-length works, "about 5,000 to 25,000 words at the very extremes."[39] Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* average around 10,000 or 11,000 words, about the size of Mark's Gospel. Plutarch's longest works in this series are about 19,000 to 20,000 words, about the size of Matthew or Luke, the two largest Gospels.

Second, the canonical Gospels are similar to ancient "lives" in form and content. Ancient biographies do not cover the whole life of the subject but tend to concentrate on the individual's public career.[40] They often begin with the subject's family background, his birth, and a few stories illustrating his upbringing, but then move quickly to his public debut. When the subject is a philosopher or teacher, more attention is given to his teachings. A feature of a number of biographies is the disproportionate amount of attention given to the subject's death.

Third, the Gospels share with biographies a singular focus on one individual. This is the hallmark of all biographical writing. In ancient biographies, as in the Gospels, the narrative subject is also the grammatical subject of a high percentage of the verbs.[41]

There are respects in which the Gospels differ from biographies of Greek and Roman antiquity, but the distinctiveness of the Gospels as a collection arises more from the unique features of the life of their subject and the extraordinary claims the evangelists make about him than from their formal literary characteristics.

What does the identification of the Gospels as ancient "lives" of Jesus mean for the interpretation of these texts? It means, first, that they should be read as books about *Jesus*.[42] This seems to state the obvious, but for a good part of the twentieth century, as a result of the influence of Schmidt, Bultmann, and others, the Gospels were viewed as reflecting primarily the situations, needs, and beliefs of the early church. A biography is a narrative focused to an exceptionally high degree on one individual. The Gospels are intensely focused on Jesus of Nazareth. He is at the center of the story and appears in almost every narrative episode, usually dominating the scene. Whatever other motives the evangelists had in writing the Gospels, their main general aim was to give an account of the words and deeds of Jesus and to convey the truth, as they saw it, about his identity and significance.

39. Ibid., 169.
40. Ibid., 178–80.
41. Ibid., 162–63.
42. Ibid., 256–58.

The identification of the Gospels as ancient biographies also means that they should be read in accordance with the biographical conventions of the period. Therefore, one should not look for a precise chronological arrangement of Jesus' activities. Ancient biographers were not fastidious about chronology or the exact order in which things happened. The Synoptic Gospels, as we have seen, agree to a remarkable extent on the order of Jesus' deeds, but there are some variations. Clearly Matthew and Luke felt free to alter the order of Mark (on the assumption of their dependence on Mark) for their own narrative purposes. Nor should one expect to find, as a rule, the "very words" (*ipsissima verba*) of Jesus, who would have spoken primarily in Aramaic rather than Greek, the language in which the Gospels were written (though occasionally the Aramaic is preserved, especially in Mark). Ancient biographers often paraphrased, abridged, and interpreted the words of their subjects; it seems clear that the evangelists, to varying degrees, did the same. Whatever theory of inspiration one brings to the Gospels, one should not require a level of exactitude in the narration of Jesus' actions and words beyond what the Gospel writers were aiming to achieve. An appreciation of the biographical genre of the Gospels enables present-day readers to align their expectations of these works with the intentions of the biographer-evangelists.

One of the best-known examples of Greco-Roman biographical writing is Plutarch's *Parallel Lives of Greek and Romans*. In this set of works, Plutarch's strategy is to pair a famous Greek figure of the past with a corresponding Roman personage, to describe the career and character of each one, and then to offer a formal comparison of the two. Thus he matches Theseus and Romulus, Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar, and Demosthenes and Cicero. Twenty-three pairs of "lives" survive, nineteen of which have a formal comparison of the two individuals.[43] Four single "lives" are also extant. If the four canonical Gospels are to be regarded as "lives" of Jesus, it seems fitting to call them "parallel lives" of Jesus, not because they follow the pattern of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*, but because they are parallel, overlapping biographies of the same individual. Written within a short time of each other (mid-60s to mid-90s CE), "the Gospels are almost unique" among the literature of the Roman imperial era, "as multiple, contemporary accounts of a single life."[44] Calling them "parallel lives" of Jesus calls attention to their biographical character, their overlapping nature, and the individual on whom they focus.

43. M. C. Howatson and Ian Chilvers, *The Concise Oxford Companion to Classical Literature* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 434–36, here 435.

44. Simon Swain, "Biography and Biographic in the Literature of the Roman Empire," in *Portraits: Biographical Representation in the Greek and Latin Literature of the Roman Empire*, ed. Mark J. Edwards and Simon Swain (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 1–38, here 33.

CONCLUSION

We have covered a lot of ground in this opening chapter. We have seen that the four Gospels have a common shape and that the first three Gospels are very similar. Yet each Gospel has distinguishing qualities that set it apart from the rest. We have considered questions relating to the composition of Gospels, paying special attention to the issue of genre. We have seen how Gospel scholars have come round to viewing the Gospels as a subtype of ancient biography. Given this generic identification, and given that the four Gospels are parallel accounts of Jesus' ministry, the four can aptly be called "parallel lives" of Jesus. In the next chapter, we directly address the question of how to read the Gospels as four yet one.

FOR FURTHER READING

Apocryphal Gospels

Ehrman, Bart, and Zlatko Plese. *The Apocryphal Gospels: Texts and Translations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Elliott, James Keith, ed. *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Foster, Paul. *The Apocryphal Gospels: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Klauck, Hans-Josef. *Apocryphal Gospels: An Introduction*. Translated by Brian McNeil. London: T&T Clark International, 2003.

Schneemelcher, Wilhelm, and R. McL. Wilson. *New Testament Apocrypha*. Vol. 1, *Gospels and Related Writings*. Rev. ed. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006.

The Synoptic Problem

Burkett, Delbert Royce. *Rethinking the Gospel Sources*. Vol. 1, *From Proto-Mark to Mark*. New York: T&T Clark International, 2004.

———. *Rethinking the Gospel Sources*. Vol. 2, *The Unity and Plurality of Q*. Society of Biblical Literature: Early Christianity and Its Literature 1. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009.

Farmer, William R. *The Gospel of Jesus: The Pastoral Relevance of the Synoptic Problem*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994.

Goodacre, Mark. *The Synoptic Problem: A Way through the Maze*. London: T&T Clark International, 2001.

Kloppenborg, John S. *Q, the Earliest Gospel: An Introduction to the Original Stories and Sayings of Jesus*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008.

Stein, Robert H. *Studying the Synoptic Gospels: Origin and Interpretation*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.

———. *The Synoptic Problem: An Introduction*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1987.

Gospel Traditions, Form and Redaction Criticism

Anderson, Janice Capel, and Stephen D. Moore, eds. *Mark and Method: New Approaches to Biblical Studies*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992.

Bauckham, Richard. *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006.

Bultmann, Rudolf, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Byrskorg, Samuel, *Story as History—History as Story: The Gospel Tradition in the Context of Ancient Oral History* WUNT 123; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000.

Fee, Gordon D. *New Testament Exegesis*. 3rd ed. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002.

Hayes, John H., and Carl R. Holladay. *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner's Handbook*. 3rd ed. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007.

McKnight, Edgar V. *What Is Form Criticism?* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969.

Perrin, Norman. *What Is Redaction Criticism?* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969.

Gospel Genre and Introductions

Aune, David E. *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment*. Library of Early Christianity 8. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1987.

Barton, Stephen C., ed. *The Cambridge Companion to the Gospels*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Blomberg, Craig L. *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction and Survey*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Academic, 1997.

Burridge, Richard A. *What Are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Cousar, Charles B. *An Introduction to the New Testament: Witnesses to God's New Work*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006.

Ehrman, Bart D. *A Brief Introduction to the New Testament*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Griffith-Jones, Robin. *The Four Witnesses: The Rebel, the Rabbi, the Chronicler, and the Mystic*. New York: HarperOne, 2004.

Nickle, Keith F. *The Synoptic Gospels: An Introduction*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.

Stanton, Graham N. *The Gospels and Jesus*. 2d ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.