"Dan Scholz offers a thoroughly readable and informative introduction to the Gospels and Acts. In this first of a two-part New Testament introduction, Scholz provides a multiangled look at these books through historical, literary, and theological lenses. Each chapter on the Gospels and Acts begins with considerations about the book's historical setting (author, dating, sources, and audience) and moves to significant exploration of how the story is told in that particular narrative, providing insight into literary devices and themes. Additional discussions are included on the historical backdrop of these books, historical Jesus study, and noncanonical early Christian gospels.

Jesus in the Gospels and Acts is clearly written and will serve the needs of those new to the New Testament and those more seasoned in reading it. Scholz invites his reader into relevant aspects of scholarly discussion and does so in accessible ways. The book is easy to navigate and contains frequent sidebars and helpful chapter conclusions with additional information to enhance the reading experience."

—Jeannine K. Brown, professor of New Testament, Bethel Seminary

"Dr. Scholz's book fills a serious lacuna in the field, namely, a solid, up-to-date examination of the gospels in their historical and literary context that, at the same time, is accessible to undergraduates of every age and creed. Reflecting the mainstream of modern biblical studies, this new edition is invaluable for any teacher struggling to give students a richer, more profound understanding of the multiple portraits of Jesus, within and beyond the canon, and their relevance for contemporary faith. This text, paired with Dr. Scholz's volume on Paul, serves as the perfect guide for an introductory course on the New Testament."

—Lance Richey, University of Saint Francis

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Jesus in the Gospels and Acts

NEW EDITION

Introducing the New Testament

Daniel J. Scholz

James A. Kelhoffer, Academic Editor

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PREFACE TO NEW EDITION

This new edition of *Jesus in the Gospels and Acts* is part of a two-volume series titled Introducing the New Testament. The other text in the series is *The Pauline Letters* (2013) also by Daniel J. Scholz.

Like the first edition of *Jesus in the Gospels and Acts*, this edition does not supplant the Gospels and Acts but complements them, offering literary, historical, and theological insights that help readers make sense of the biblical text.

The text's organization and language, considerate of a religiously diverse audience, enhance the accessibility of the author's exploration of Jesus and the New Testament. The charts, maps, sidebars, images, and summaries offer the visual variety and graphic support essential to visual learners. The layout of the text conveys the hierarchy and types of information, calling out biblical book outlines, core concepts, and supplemental information.

Each chapter concludes with questions for review and theological reflection. An annotated bibliography at the end of each chapter provides recommendations for further reading that can serve as starting points for writing papers. The recommended works and authors are some of the best in biblical scholarship.

New elements in this edition include minor content updates, footnotes in place of endnotes so readers can find references and additional information without turning pages, an updated interior layout, and additional photographs and paintings intended to enhance the visual appeal and educational value of the text.

INTRODUCTION

Studying Jesus and the Gospels

This book focuses on the central figure of the Christian Scriptures: Jesus. Arguably, no other figure in history has had more influence in shaping many of the religious and cultural norms in the world today. Regardless of one's faith tradition or lack thereof, possessing a working knowledge of Jesus and the Gospels is important for religious, historical, and cultural literacy. In the Christian Scriptures, the four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are the primary sources of information about Jesus. Other sources close to these Gospels (for example, the Acts of the Apostles, writings of the early church fathers, and second-century extracanonical gospels) augment them.

To begin, three points must be stressed about Jesus and the Gospels. First, Jesus of Nazareth was a first-century *Jew* of the ancient Mediterranean world; therefore, any understanding of the historical Jesus must be grounded in situating him within his Jewish social, political, and religious environment. Second, the Hebrew Scriptures, especially the prophetic books, heavily influenced the authors of the four Gospels and Acts; thus, a working knowledge of the entire Bible, as well as of the types of Judaism that existed in Jesus' time, will help make sense of Jesus and the Gospels. Third, first-century authors who believed that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah and Son of God wrote the Gospels and Acts. The four Gospels and Acts are, in fact, a complex interweaving of history, literature, and theology that is not easily disentangled. This is highlighted here because much of the content and structure of this book reflects this reality.

For Christians, the Bible divides into two parts: the first testament, also called the Hebrew Scriptures or Old Testament; and the

second testament, also called the Christian Scriptures or New Testament. This book uses the terms *Christian Scriptures* and *New Testament* interchangeably. The writers of the New Testament had both a literary and a theological dependency on the Hebrew Scriptures as they proclaimed their belief in Jesus as the Jewish Messiah and the Son of God. Nowhere is this more evident than in the four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, which narrate the life of Jesus. Jesus is the central figure in the Christian Scriptures, but the Gospel evangelists relied heavily on the Hebrew Scriptures as they shaped and framed the story of Jesus.

Although the New Testament authors relied on the texts and theology of the Hebrew Scriptures to support their faith claims about Jesus, they also employed a new literary form (that is, the gospel form) to tell the story of Jesus. There are no gospels in the Hebrew Scriptures.

What then are these four Gospels on a literary level? The four tell us about the life and death of Jesus. In this sense, the Gospels can be broadly described as ancient biographies, because they essentially provide a written account of a person's life. Many scholars argue that the Gospels are in fact a subtype of an ancient Greco-Roman biography, with a unique focus on Jesus. Yet the claim of the Gospels (for example, Jesus as Son of God and Jewish Messiah) and the mixing of various subgenres (for example, miracle stories, parables, genealogies, and passion narratives) into an overarching genre (biography), likely pushed the Gospels beyond the typical ancient Greco-Roman biographies, which neither made such claims nor mixed genres.

The word *ancient* is stressed with *the Gospels* because unlike modern biographies that rely heavily on reporting objective facts and offer a context for the information presented, the Gospels provide modest objectivity and selective contextualization. The authors of the Gospels have an agenda: they are trying to convince their audience of what they *believe* about the life and death of Jesus. Often, the Gospel writers assume the audience has the necessary background and information to make sense of the details they offer. At times, this assumption includes knowledge of and familiarity with the Hebrew Scriptures, as well as certain other sources, both oral and written.

Again, this is not to suggest that the Gospels and Acts are utterly subjective or that they provide no context at all. It is an objective fact,

for example, that Jesus was a Jew and that he was executed by crucifixion. In addition, the Gospel writers do provide some context for the life of Jesus, including events and figures of his day (see Lk 2:1–2, 3:1–2), as well as events and figures from the Hebrew Scriptures (see the genealogies of Matt 1:1–18 and Lk 3:23-28). However, most of the work involved in sorting through issues of objectivity and contextualization belongs to the modern reader of the Gospels and contemporary and evolving scholarship.

What else do the Christian Scriptures contain in addition to the four Gospels? There are twenty-seven "books" in the Christian Scriptures. Twenty of these books are actually letters; these are attributed to the earliest followers of Jesus: Paul, James, Peter, John, and Jude. There are also the Letter to the Hebrews, which is actually a sermon by an anonymous author; the Acts of the Apostles (part 2 of the Gospel of Luke); and the book of Revelation.

The order of the twenty-seven books in the Christian Scriptures follows the sequence of events beginning with the life of Jesus and ending with the *eschaton* (the end of the age). The chart on page 12 shows the order of the books and the events they narrate.

Just as the four Gospels are a type of ancient biography, the remaining books of the Christian Scriptures are ancient forms of letters, a sermon (Hebrews), a history (Acts), and an apocalyptic writing (Revelation). The subject of Jesus and the beliefs of his earliest followers are evident throughout each of these books. Like the Gospels, all of them are complex tapestries woven from the beliefs of the authors, the theology of the Hebrew Scriptures, and the literary forms of the ancient Mediterranean world.

Jesus in the Gospels and Acts addresses much of the contextual and background information needed to make sense of Jesus of Nazareth and the four Gospels. Chapter 1, "Understanding the World of Jesus and Interpreting the Gospels," bridges the span between the ancient Mediterranean and the twenty-first-century Western (U.S.) world. A distance not only of time (two thousand years) but also of culture (social, political, and religious) must be overcome if Jesus and the Gospels are to be understood. Chapter 1 of this book provides a lens through which to view Jesus and read the Gospel narratives. It also introduces some modern methods for interpreting the Gospels. Chapters 2–6 take up the Gospels of Mark, Matthew, Luke,

Sequence of events	Order of the 27 books
The life of Jesus	Matthew Mark Luke John
The story of the early Church	Acts of the Apostles
The letters attributed to Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles (from longest to shortest)	Romans 1 Corinthians 2 Corinthians Galatians Ephesians Philippians Colossians 1 Thessalonians 2 Thessalonians 1 Timothy 2 Timothy Titus Philemon
A sermon	Hebrews (anonymous author)
The letters of other apostolic figures	1 James 1 Peter 2 Peter 1 John 2 John 3 John Jude
The story of the age to come	Revelation

and John and Acts. The Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles are included as back-to-back chapters because nearly all scholars are

convinced that Luke and Acts were written by the same author and that these two books have a coherent, consistent literary and theological design that is best understood when read as one narrative. Chapters 2–6 focus on the relevant historical, theological, and literary issues at play in each of the Gospels and Acts.

The order of the chapters, beginning with Mark and ending with John, follows what most scholars think is the chronological order in which the Gospels were written:

Mark	about 65–70 CE
Matthew	about 80–85 CE
Luke-Acts	about 85–90 CE
John	about 90–100 CE

The term *about* is used because scholars are not certain as to the exact dates the Gospels were written. It is, however, their near-unanimous opinion that Mark was written first and that both Matthew and Luke relied heavily on Mark in producing their Gospels. To begin with Mark, then, makes sense.

Chapter 7, "The Historical Jesus," has a twofold aim: to discuss scholarly attempts to discover the historical Jesus and to offer a sketch of the historical Jesus based on contemporary research. Chapter 8, "Other Early Christian Gospels," is included because these writings reflect a developing tradition that reached back to the era of the Christian Scriptures. Gospels such as those of Thomas, Mary, and Philip warrant attention because these writings provide a bigger picture of the Christian beliefs and understandings of Jesus well into the second and third centuries. Having some background on these extracanonical gospels can lead to a better understanding of the canonical Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John and Acts.

CHAPTER 1

Understanding the World of Jesus and Interpreting the Gospels

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is twofold: to provide a lens through which to view the world of Jesus and to introduce some of the methods scholars use to interpret the New Testament Gospels. This dual focus will create a fuller picture of the Gospel narratives as they were read at the time of the early church and as these narratives are understood today.

Anachronism and Ethnocentrism

Two pitfalls should be considered before entering into the world of Jesus and employing various methods for interpreting the Gospels: *anachronism* and *ethnocentrism*.[1] *Anachronism* literally means "a chronological misplacing of a person or thing." With respect to Jesus and the Gospels, anachronism occurs when modern readers project twenty-first-century time and culture onto the Mediterranean world of Jesus and the Gospel authors. *Ethnocentrism* means "perceiving something with the attitude that one's own group is superior." Relative to the Gospels, readers today are guilty of ethnocentrism when

1. Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (3rd ed.; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 10: "[*Ethnocentrism*] entails imposing your own cultural interpretations of persons, things, and events on other people. When applied to history, such ethnocentrism is called *anachronism*—imposing the cultural artifacts, meanings, and behavior of your own period on the people of the past."

they impose their cultural norms and values onto the cultural norms and values of Jesus and his contemporaries. Anachronism and ethnocentrism skew and distort understanding.[2]

Overcoming the Distance between Us and Them

To be aware of anachronism and ethnocentrism is to recognize that a tremendous distance must be traveled to understand Jesus and the Gospels. The distance is not simply one of time but also of culture: a social, political, and religious distance.[3] The ancient Mediterranean world in which the Gospel authors lived bears little resemblance to the world in the twenty-first century. These authors must be conceived on their terms, because in creating the Gospels, they were not thinking in twenty-first century terms.[4] Jesus' call of Levi illustrates well the distance needed to travel.

The call of Levi is preserved by three Gospel writers: Matthew 9:9–14, Mark 2:14–17, and Luke 5:27–32. To answer the twenty-first-century question, "Why did the Gospel writers consider the call of Levi significant?" the perspective of first-century Jewish culture must be understood.

The Jewish social norms of Jesus' day left the call of Levi nothing short of scandalous. As a tax collector, Levi belonged to a profession despised by most Jews, who saw tax collectors as collaborators in their oppression by the Romans and the Jewish ruling elites. The scandal centers on Jesus' eating and drinking with Levi and his

2. A recent series of social-science commentaries seek to minimize anachronistic and ethnocentric readings of New Testament texts. See Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (2nd ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003). Also of value is Malina and Rohrbaugh's companion volume *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998).

3. "Overcoming the distance between us and them" is a concept adopted from the introduction of Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels:* "We must also recognize, as indeed recent social-scientific studies of the New Testament have begun to do, that the distance between ourselves and the Bible is social as well as temporal and conceptual," 2.

4. Ibid., 10: "We will have to voluntarily enter the world that they presumed existed when they wrote. We will have to be willing to do what is necessary in order to bring to our reading a set of mental scenarios proper to their time, place, and culture instead of importing ones from modern America."

The Call of Levi

After this, [Jesus] went out and saw a tax collector named Levi sitting at the customs post. He said to him, "Follow me." And leaving everything behind, he got up and followed him. Then Levi gave a great banquet for him in his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were at the table with them. The Pharisees and their scribes complained to his disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with the tax collectors and sinners?" Jesus said to them in reply, "Those who are healthy do not need a physician, but the sick do. I have not come to call the righteous to repentance but sinners." (Lk 5:27–32)

friends, sharing table fellowship with them. In Jewish culture, who you reclined at table with was directly tied to your identity and to the identity of your kinship group. Respectable Jews would have avoided table fellowship with a tax collector. In this story, Jesus not only eats with Levi, but he also invites him to "follow" him, to join the kinship group that Jesus is forming with his public ministry. Many Jews would have been appalled by such a deliberate invitation from Jesus. This is a likely explanation for why the call of Levi was remembered and preserved by Jesus' followers. Knowing the social stigma associated with tax collectors, the social norm of sharing meals with your kin, and the personal identification with your kinship group helps modern readers of the Gospels better appreciate the radically inclusive nature of Jesus' invitation to discipleship—a core meaning of this story whenever and from whatever perspective a reader might encounter it.

PART 1: UNDERSTANDING THE WORLD OF JESUS

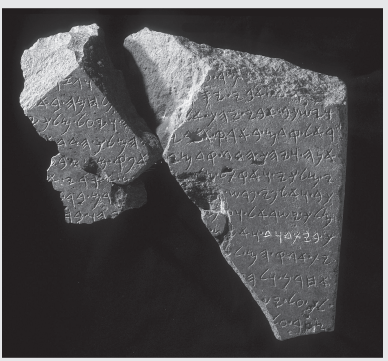
So what kind of world did Jesus live in? The Hebrew Scriptures that predate Jesus provide us with some valuable clues. However, before considering the development of Israel as told in the Hebrew Bible, a few precautions should be highlighted.

The Hebrew Scriptures and the World of Jesus

Speaking of Jewish *biblical history* requires care, because much of that "history" is unverifiable by evidence outside the pages of the Hebrew Scriptures. Although there is a consensus on many of the events reported in the Hebrew Scriptures (for example, the united monarchy began about 1020 BCE), the cycle of stories found in Genesis 1–11 (creation, Adam and Eve, Noah and the ark, the Tower of Babel) comprises a notable exception. Historians do not attempt to date these stories, which begin the Hebrew Scriptures; Genesis 1–11 remain a "prehistory" due to the mythological nature of the texts.

Archeological discoveries have helped to verify some events narrated in the Hebrew Scriptures. Even though evidence exists that supports the existence of King David, this is not to say that beginning

House of David



Tel Dan Stele

In 1993 and 1994, biblical archeologists discovered fragments of a stele (a stone slab) at Tel Dan, a mound in northern Israel where a city once stood. The fragments appear to contain the Hebrew letters for "house of David."

As is often the case with finds such as these, questions have been raised about whether the inscription is authentic or a forgery. If authentic, the discovery of the Tel Dan stele is significant because it offers evidence of a figure recorded in biblical history.

According to the Hebrew Scriptures, David ruled as the King of Israel for about forty years. Most historians date King David's reign from about 1000 to 961 BCE.

Changing Names: The Hebrews, the Israelites, and the Jews

HEBREWS: The Semitic tribal people who originated about four thousand years ago and followed the leadership of patriarchs including Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were first known as the Hebrews.

ISRAELITES: After the Hebrews were freed from Egyptian slavery under the leadership of Moses, they founded the nation of Israel. With a newfound national identity, the Hebrews became known as the Israelites.

JEWS: After the Israelites' release from exile in Babylon (587–538 BCE), it is said that only the descendents of the tribe of Judah (that is, the Judeans, or Jews) survived. Thus, the postexilic Israelites became commonly referred to as Jews.

The people of the first-century Jewish world would have understood any of these three names as a legitimate reference to themselves. See, for example, how Paul describes himself in Philippians 3:5–6.

with King David (about 1000 BCE) all of the events and people in the Hebrew Scriptures are verifiable by external evidence. In fact, most of the people and events in the narrative before and after 1000 BCE await external confirmation. Furthermore, not everything presented in the Hebrew Scriptures can be externally confirmed. For example, the story of the Nephilim (Gen 6:1–4) is more literary in nature than factually real.

Questions regarding how the Hebrew Scriptures shaped Jesus and the world of first-century Jews can be addressed independently of questions regarding the Scriptures' historical accuracy. What is more certain than the historicity of the people and events of the Hebrew Scriptures is the influence of the *storyline* of the Hebrew Scriptures, the narration of Jewish biblical history, on Jesus, his fellow Jews, and the Gospel writers. What follows, then, is a brief overview of certain narratives and themes in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Abraham and Moses

Taken together, the Hebrew Bible presents a nearly two-thousand-year narrative history before the time of Jesus and the Gospels. According to the storyline of the Hebrew Scriptures, the Jewish people transitioned from a tribal people known as the Hebrews to founders and citizens of a nation called Israel to, after a period of exile in Babylon, a people called the Jews. The politics and religion described in these three periods differ dramatically. What is consistent in the storyline of the Hebrew Scriptures, however, is the Israelites' understanding of themselves—historically and culturally—as a people defined by their relationship with God. This relationship formed Israel's identity as a people and as a nation.

From their origins as a nomadic tribal people (families or clans grouped and traveling together), the Hebrews were *elected* by God to be God's people. According to the book of Genesis, Abraham, a chieftain from a tribe of people in Babylonia, entered into a covenant with Yahweh. Yahweh offered to bless Abraham with land and descendents if Abraham agreed that his tribe would be God's people. This covenant was sealed by a "mark in the flesh" (circumcision of males). This mark of circumcision confirmed this tribe's identity as Yahweh's people. Under Abraham and the mark of circumcision, the tribal members came to be known as the Hebrew people. In the book of Genesis, it is clear that Yahweh's election of Abraham and the mark of circumcision had political and religious ramifications. Circumcision was both an outward religious sign of fidelity and a statement of political allegiance to Yahweh.

The book of Exodus tells of Yahweh's call of Moses to lead his people out of Egyptian slavery and form them into the nation of Israel. With Moses, Yahweh established a new covenant, a binding relationship, not just with one man (Abraham) but with an entire nation (Israel), centered on the Law (the Torah, or "teaching," "instruction") that Moses received from Yahweh on Mount Sinai (see Ex 20–23). Although other cultures at that time lived by similar codes, Israel's understanding and practice of the Law helped them to define themselves. For Israel, the Law was more than a code of conduct, the Torah (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) also recounted the stories of Israel's ancestors such as Abraham and Sarah, Joseph and his brothers,

God's Name

Out of respect for Jews who do not pronounce the name of God (*Yahweh*), it is common to use the tetragrammation (YHWH) or the alternative vocalization of the name (*Adonai*).

and the Israelites' forty years of wandering in the desert. Also integral to living the Law for Israel was the practice of offering sacrifice to God, including animal sacrifice, as a means of maintaining a covenantal relationship with Yahweh. Following the Law would become the founding doctrine that defined Israel's national identity.

Saul, David, and Solomon

Israel indeed became a nation in the ancient Near East, building itself over time into a united monarchy under the leadership of three kings: Saul, David, and Solomon. The books of 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, and 1 and 2 Chronicles narrate the events leading to the creation, successes, and failures of this monarchy. These six books are by no means "objective" history in the modern sense of the word. Their final written form came together centuries after the events they are reporting, with historical hindsight and often with an agenda—sometimes favorable, other times not—regarding the monarchy.

Subsequent generations of Jews would look back to the period of David's kingship as Israel's "golden age." During the monarchy period, Israel was enjoying the fruits of the covenantal promises Yahweh made with Abraham (the Promised Land and descendents) and Moses (Israel had become a great and purportedly holy nation). Subsequently, David established Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, and David's son Solomon built Israel's Temple, the central place of worship for the nation, in Jerusalem. Yahweh also established a new covenant with David: "Your house and your kingdom shall endure forever before me; your throne shall stand firm forever" (2 Sm 7:16).

Jesus as "Son of David"

Matthew, Mark, and Luke all tell of the story of Jesus' healing of the blind man (men): see Matthew 20:29–34, Mark 10:46–52, and Luke 18:35–43. Although many of the details differ in each Gospel, the reference to Jesus as "Son of David" is consistent. The Davidic covenant from 2 Samuel 7:8–16 tied Jesus' identity as the Messiah to the house and lineage of David. The reference to Jesus as "Son of David" was the blind man's confession of faith in Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah.

This covenant planted the seed for Israel's later anticipation of the Messiah. Together, the city of Jerusalem, the Temple, and the Davidic covenant formed the defining characteristics of Israel's religious and political identity.

Solomon reigned as the third and last king of the united monarchy. Known for his wisdom, Solomon secured Israel as an important nation in the Near East of the tenth century BCE. After Solomon's death, the monarchy was divided between Solomon's sons, Jeroboam and Rehoboam.

A People Divided

As powerful and formative as the united monarchy was, under Solomon's sons the monarchy was unable to maintain a united vision and leadership. Consequently, Israel entered a new phase as a divided nation living under two kingdoms. The Northern Kingdom of Israel consisted of nine and one-half of the original twelve tribes, while the Southern Kingdom of Judah had the remaining two and one-half tribes. No longer a united monarchy, Israel now lived in separate "houses," the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

Roughly coinciding with the development of the nation of Israel was the rise of the prophets. In times of crisis, the prophets attempted to awaken in Israel a sense of social justice and radical monotheism, the belief that Yahweh was the Lord of history and the universe. The prophets taught Israel that Yahweh alone is their God

(see Deut 6:4–9, later embraced as the heart of the Mosaic Law). The prophets envisioned an Israelite people whose strong sense of social justice should be combined with its belief in monotheism.

At the time of the first crisis, the house of Israel and the house of Judah were unwilling to live by the standards set by the Torah, according to the Hebrew Scriptures. The people of Israel lost sight of their singular allegiance to their God of history and the universe and did not heed the prophetic warnings of impending exile. Consequently, the Northern Kingdom of Israel was captured, destroyed, and exiled by the Assyrian Empire. Roughly two hundred years later, beginning in 597 BCE, the Babylonian Empire captured and destroyed the Southern Kingdom of Judah. The Exile in Babylon (597–538 BCE) marked some of the darkest days in Israel's history. Stripped of the Promised Land, with Jerusalem and the Temple in ruins, what little remained of the united monarchy of the twelve tribes of Israel was now forced into exile.

It was not until the rise of the Persian Empire in the sixth century BCE that the captive and exiled Israelites in Babylon saw hope for a new day. King Cyrus of Persia destroyed the Babylonian Empire and released the Israelites from captivity and exile. This, along with

The Prophets of Israel

The Hebrew Scriptures depict the rise of prophets in response to three major crises in Israel's history: the Assyrian crisis, the Babylonian crisis, and the Persian crisis.

- The eighth-century Assyrian destruction of the Northern Kingdom of Israel led to the prophets Isaiah, Micah, Amos, and Hosea.
- The sixth-century Babylonian capture and exile of the Southern Kingdom of Judah led to the prophets Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Nahum, Obadiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Second Isaiah.
- The fifth-century Persian release and restoration of Israel led to the prophets Third Isaiah, Haggai, Zechariah, Joel, Malachi, and Jonah.

the prophetic visions in Ezekiel and Isaiah, breathed new life into the exiled Israelites. With the Babylonians destroyed and the Persians now in power, King Cyrus of Persia allowed the exiles to return to their Promised Land and begin rebuilding their city of Jerusalem and their Temple. Some of the exiles went back to the Promised Land (Judea), while others dispersed outside the regions of the Promised Land. The latter became known as the *Diaspora*, literally, the "scattering" of Jewish communities throughout the Greco-Roman world.

Period of Rebuilding

Israel now entered another phase of its history, a period of rebuilding. The process of restoring the ravaged ancestral land and rebuilding the destroyed Temple was instrumental in the formation of the political and religious identity of the community of Israel, now called the Jews. Ezra and Nehemiah led the small postexilic community in the restoration of Israel. The priest Ezra refocused the community on fidelity to the Torah, which most likely reached its final written form during this period. With the support of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, Ezra led the community in religious reform. Nehemiah oversaw the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem and the instituting of administrative reforms that assured the postexilic community its political and economic survival. The rebuilding of Jerusalem's Temple in 515 BCE proved crucial, as it once again became the center of the religious life of the Jews in Judea and surrounding lands.

According to the Hebrew Scriptures, a history of election and covenant combined with a growing awareness of God's fidelity to his chosen people in Israel preceded and shaped the world of Jesus and the Gospel writers. The awareness of God's fidelity, however, was matched by a growing recognition of Israel's infidelity and failure to keep God's covenant. With this historical backdrop, attention now shifts to the social, political, and religious realities of Jesus' day.

Overcoming Social Distance

In order to grasp the New Testament, it is necessary to travel a significant social, political, and religious distance and examine the ancient Mediterranean world from which it emerged. First considered is the social distance.

In recent decades, scholars studying the New Testament from a social science perspective have found intriguing contrasts between modern Western social norms, values, and perceptions and those of the ancient Mediterranean.[5]

Honor and Shame

All cultures have social norms and values that shape and regulate life among their members. These norms and values apply to individuals and groups and help define appropriate and inappropriate behaviors. At the time of the New Testament, people followed social norms and values different from modern times. For the ancients, honor and shame were pivotal values that set the standard for all social interaction. Furthermore, God was viewed as the source and arbiter of social values and norms. Honor was both ascribed (set by one's birth) and acquired (gained through social interactions). Upholding and defending the honor of one's immediate family and larger kinship group, as well as protecting them from shame, was paramount.

Collective Identity

Closely connected to the importance of honor and shame was the ancient Mediterranean's emphasis on collective identity. For the ancients, a person's kinship group, or immediate and extended family members, formed the basis for one's sense of self. The honor and reputation of one's kinship group provided the basis for self-understanding, or identity. For modern Western people, freedom, independence, and individuality are arguably the pivotal norms and values of social interactions. For people of the ancient Mediterranean, honor, shame, and group identity were the pivotal norms and values of social interaction.

Limited Goods

The perception of resources presents another social disconnect between the people of the New Testament and the twenty-first

5. The categories of honor and shame, first-century personality, limited good, and purity laws are taken from some of the chapter headings in Malina, *The New Testament World*. See Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (2nd ed.; New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), for one of the pioneering studies on the social world of the New Testament period.

century. People in the United States and many other modern Western countries enjoy unprecedented wealth and access to resources such as food, water, and land. That sense of abundance also applies to the human resources such as love, honor, and reputation. For people living in the New Testament world, however, all resources, material and human, were seen as limited. To a large degree, the ancients' perception of limited resources was based on the reality of their world: by modern standards, the vast majority of ancient people were extremely poor, with restricted access to natural resources such as land. They carried this perception of limits to human resources as well. In a social network of neighbors and kin, honor and reputation were, like land and food, carefully distributed and never hoarded. This is one reason that Jesus' call to leave family behind and follow him had enormous social, economic, and religious implications and powerfully affected one's relations with neighbors and kin.

Human resources such as honor and shame were exchanged in more informal, less easily measured ways than were material resources such as food and land. For example, the system of patron-client relationships, common in the ancient world, included both human- and material-resource exchanges: a patron could offer a client access to material resources otherwise unavailable to him or her; in exchange, the client could provide the patron with an honorable reputation in the arena of public opinion.

Purity Laws

In the tightly controlled social world of the ancient Mediterranean, purity laws, many with their roots in the Old Testament, were central to the rituals that defined the Jewish sense of collective identity. Keeping the Law was considered key to keeping Jews clean (pure) in the presence of each other and in the presence of God. Jewish purity laws were intended to separate the clean from the unclean and, ultimately, the sacred from the profane, in religious ritual observances. The purity laws kept unclean Jews (such as menstruating women and men with seminal emissions) separated from clean Jews; for example, husbands might be separated from wives until both were ritually clean. These Jewish purity laws were deeply rooted historically and psychologically in the desire to be clean in God's holy

Jesus Cleanses a Leper

When Jesus came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him. And then a leper approached, did him homage, and said, "Lord, if you wish, you can make me clean." He stretched out his hand, touched him, and said, "I will do it. Be made clean." His leprosy was cleansed immediately. Then Jesus said to him, "See that you tell no one, but go show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses prescribed; that will be proof for them." (Matt 8:1–4)

presence. At the time of Jesus, however, not all Jews agreed on how to interpret and practice the principles of purity. Such debates among Jesus' followers and critics provide an essential background for the story of Jesus' cleansing of the leper.

Jesus' cleansing of the leper illustrates the actual and symbolic value of purity at the time of Jesus, as well as Jesus' allegiance to and respect for his Hebrew ancestry. According to Jewish purity laws in the first century, lepers had to be separated from the community because their contagious disease made them unclean. Notice that upon healing this man of leprosy, making him "clean," Jesus tells the man to go to the priest, for it is the priest alone who determines whether the man can return to the community. When Jesus tells the man to "offer the gift prescribed by Moses," he is referring to the Hebrew Scriptures, the book of Leviticus 14:1–9, which prescribes the procedure for "purification after leprosy." In his healing ministry, Jesus clearly works within the context of Jewish purity laws.

Not only purity laws are at play in the story of Jesus cleansing a leper; principles of honor and shame are also important. The leper paid Jesus "homage" in front of the "great crowds," and the crowds bore witness to this healing (cleansing) event, thus increasing Jesus' honor and reputation. Additionally, the leper's shame and separation from the community were removed as he was made clean. The former leper could now identify himself with the "clean" collective community that he had belonged to before contracting this disease.

Understanding basic ancient Mediterranean social norms and values such as honor and shame, collective identity, limited goods, and purity laws gives valuable insight into the meaning and impact of Jesus' words and actions, as well as the intent of the Gospel writers. A great political and religious distance must also be traveled to appreciate the ancient Mediterranean world. To do so, it is necessary to examine some of the religious and political institutions of Jesus' time, how they evolved, and what they meant to Jesus and his contemporaries.

Overcoming Our Political and Religious Distance

The political and religious institutions and groups that Jesus encountered in his lifetime had roots reaching back centuries. Together, these institutions and groups formed the world in which Jesus lived.

The Greco-Roman and Jewish Political and Religious Landscape

Jesus lived in a territory known as Palestine, a strip of land on the eastern side of the massive Roman Empire. During Jesus' lifetime, Palestine stretched about one hundred fifty miles from north to south and sixty miles from east to west. The Mediterranean Sea formed its western shoreline, while farther inland were two smaller bodies of water, the Sea of Galilee in northern Palestine and the Dead Sea in southern Palestine. The Jordan River connected these two seas. Jesus grew up in the northern region of Palestine known as Galilee, in the small village of Nazareth.

The ancient territory of Palestine, which included Galilee, Samaria, and Judea, has a special place in Jewish history and religion. Palestine was Israel's historic Promised Land and was the territory held and ruled by the great King David (beginning about 1000 BCE). Although many first-century Jews lived and practiced their religion in Palestine, the territory was nonetheless under foreign control. (See table 1 for a time line of events within Judaism from the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem following the Babylonian Exile to its destruction by the Roman Empire.)

In fact, as table 1 demonstrates, foreign domination characterized the Jewish state of Palestine during the Second Temple period (515 BCE–70 CE) and beyond. However, numerically speaking, at the time of Jesus most Jews lived outside Palestine in what is called the Diaspora (or "scattering"). Jewish identity in the Diaspora remained strong, because most Jews had been living in their locations outside Palestine for generations and, consequently, had not experienced foreign domination.

Table 1: Time Line of Events within Second Temple Judaism

Second Temple Judaism covers the years 520–515 BCE to 70 CE, from the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem after the return from the Babylonian Exile to the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem by the Roman Empire.

539–332 BCE	The Persian Empire dominates
520–515 BCE	Jews return from Babylon and rebuild the Temple
336–323 BCE	Alexander the Great conquers the Persian Empire; "Hellenization" begins
circa 300–200 BCE	Ptolemaic rule of Palestine
197–168 BCE	Seleucid rule of Palestine
168–164 BCE	Maccabean Revolt
142–63 BCE	Hasmonean Dynasty
63 BCE	Pompey enters Jerusalem
40–4 BCE	Herod the Great rules Palestine
20–19 BCE	The Temple renovated
circa 6 BCE	Birth of Jesus
4 BCE	Death of Herod
4 BCE–39 CE	Herod Antipas rules Galilee
26–36 CE	Roman Prefect Pontius Pilate governs Palestine
28–30 CE	Public ministry of Jesus
66–73 CE	First Jewish Revolt against Rome
70 CE	Destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple
132–135 CE	Second Jewish Revolt against Rome

Alexander the Great, His Successors, and the Rise of Hellenization

Alexander the Great, king of Macedonia, ruled for a relatively short time, from 336 to 323 BCE. However, in that time, Alexander and his armies were able to overthrow the Persian Empire that had stood for nearly two centuries and establish the Empire of Alexander the Great as the dominant force from Greece all the way east to India. The widespread dissemination of Greek language, ideas, and customs beyond Greece and Macedonia to other peoples and regions is called Hellenization. Even after the Roman Empire had conquered the Greeks, Hellenization remained a major influence in the eastern portions of the empire, including Palestine.

As brilliant a military and political leader as Alexander was, the united force of his empire did not last long after his untimely death (possibly from fever) at age thirty-two. The vast territory that Alexander controlled during his life splintered after his death. Large sections of Alexander's empire, however, did remain intact and under the control of his successors. Two of Alexander's successors, Ptolemy and Seleucus, emerged and established their own dynasties beginning approximately 300 BCE. Ptolemy took control of Egypt and Palestine, while Seleucus took control of Syria. For nearly a century (about 300–200 BCE), the Jews in Palestine lived peaceably under the Ptolemaic Dynasty. Jewish fortunes in Palestine began to change, however, when the Seleucid kings of Syria took control of Palestine

The Second Temple Period

The years between the rebuilding of the Temple under the Persians (515 BCE) and the destruction of the Temple by Romans during the First Jewish Revolt (70 CE) are referred to as the Second Temple period. This was an important time in Jewish history. Indeed, most of the Hebrew Scriptures came together in their final form during this time.

The First Temple period was the time between Solomon's original building of the Temple in Jerusalem (about 1000 BCE) and the Babylonian destruction of the Temple in 587 BCE.

Jewish Revolts

During foreign occupations of Palestine, the Jewish people marshaled three major revolts, one against the Greek Seleucids and two against the Roman Empire.

Maccabean Revolt against the Seleucids: 168–164 BCE

First Jewish Revolt against Rome: 66–73 CE

Second Jewish Revolt against Rome: 132–135 CE

Only the Maccabean Revolt succeeded. The two revolts against the Roman Empire resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE and again in 135 CE. After the Second Jewish Revolt (the Bar Kokhba Revolt of 132–135 CE), Romans prohibited Jews (and Judaic Christians) from living in Palestine.

and forced out the Ptolemaic presence. The Seleucid Dynasty ruled Palestine from 197 to 168 BCE. These were difficult years for Palestinian Jews, especially when Hellenization was forced upon them under the rule of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, 175–163 BCE.

Whereas many Palestinian Jews welcomed Hellenization, others fiercely fought for their Jewish ancestral traditions and practices. Jewish resistance to Antiochus and his Hellenization policies was led by the *Hasidim* ("the pious ones"). Many Hasidim, refusing to succumb to Antiochus, died for their faith. The Pharisees of Jesus' day counted themselves as descendents of the Hasidim.

Led by Mattathias and his sons, some Jews banned together to fight Antiochus and his Hellenistic Greek army in Syria. Although Mattathias died, his son, Judas Maccabeus, continued the revolt. Beginning in 168 BCE, in what was known as the Maccabean Revolt, Judas Maccabeus and his band of fighters ultimately defeated the Syrian army. In 164 BCE, Judas Maccabeus reclaimed the Temple in Jerusalem, used for some two years prior for the religious services of the occupying Seleucid soldiers, and purified it of the "abomination" of the presence of foreign gods (that is, Zeus). By 142 BCE, the Syrians had no other choice but

to grant independence to the Jews. Although by no means popular with all Palestinian Jews, the Hasmonean (Maccabean) Dynasty was established.

Palestinian Jews maintained their independence until 63 BCE, when the Roman general Pompey occupied Palestine and seized control of Jerusalem, later placing Syrio-Palestine under Roman control.

The Roman Empire and Emperors

The Roman Empire was the foreign power occupying Palestine during the life of Jesus. In the empire's early decades several men (Julius Caesar, Pompey, and Crassus) shared rule, overseen by the

Roman Emperors in the Time of Jesus and the New Testament

Augustus (Octavian)	27 BCE–14 CE
Tiberius	14–37 CE
Gaius (Caligula)	37–41 CE
Claudius	41–54 CE
Nero	54–68 CE
Galba, Ortho, and Vitellius	68–69 CE
Vespasian	69–79 CE
Titus	79–81 CE
Domitian	81–96 CE
Nerva	96–98 CE
Trajan	98–117 CE
Hadrian	117–138 CE

Only three of the emperors are mentioned by name in the New Testament (Augustus, Tiberius, and Claudius). Some scholars suspect that the two "beasts" of the land and sea from the book of Revelation 13:1–8 is a reference to the emperors Nero and Domitian.

Roman Senate. In 40 BCE, the Senate appointed Herod the Great as king of Judea. Strong Jewish resistance to the appointment required Herod to take control of Jerusalem by force. It was not until 27 BCE that the Roman Empire had but one ruler, Octavian, named "Augustus" by the Senate. Augustus served as Rome's first emperor, 27 BCE–14 CE; he was succeeded by his stepson, Tiberius, 14–37 CE. Both Augustus and Tiberius reigned as emperors of Rome during the life of Jesus. In fact, Tiberius had appointed Pontius Pilate to govern Judea, 26–36 CE. Pilate would eventually hand over Jesus to be crucified.

The Gospel of Luke and Acts of the Apostles mention three Roman emperors by name. Luke says that Caesar Augustus was emperor at the time of Jesus' birth (Lk 2:1) and that Tiberius was emperor during the public preaching of John the Baptist and the ministry of Jesus (Lk 3:1). Luke also says that Claudius expelled Jews from Rome because of riots (Acts 11:28–30).

The Herod Family

More so than the emperors of Rome, the family of Herod the Great had a direct impact on Jews in Palestine. Herod the Great ruled Palestine for nearly four decades, 40–4 BCE. After Herod's death in 4 BCE, his kingdom was divided among his three sons: Antipas, Philip, and Archelaus. It was Herod Antipas, ruler of Galilee and Perea (4 BCE–39 CE), who beheaded John the Baptist (Mk 6:14–29; Matt 14:1–12) and who, during Jesus' ministry, purportedly sought to kill Jesus (Lk 13:31–33). According to Luke, Jesus was put on trial in front of Herod Antipas (Lk 23:6–16).

Greco-Roman Cult Religion: Roman and Mystery

Jews were distinct in their belief in, and worship of, one God (monotheism). The vast majority of people living in the Roman Empire were polytheistic, worshipping many gods. Cities within the Roman Empire had their own gods and sanctuaries, where devotions to the gods took place, and cultic activity within Rome was diverse as well. Worshipping the gods of the Roman Empire did not involve a profession of creeds (a statement of beliefs) but rather a practice of rites (ceremonial acts), which were performed by those specifically trained for the tasks.

There was also the practice of the emperor cult, which held that some of the Roman emperors possessed divine qualities and were, in fact, gods themselves. How widespread this belief was among the people is not known, but it was expressed by assigning titles such as "Lord" or "Son of God" to the emperors, especially after their deaths, in recognition of their accomplishments.

Mystery cults were also integral to religious practices in the Roman Empire. Members of these mystery cults vowed to keep secret the practice of the rites performed to their god. The sharing of meals with the god and other members of the mystery cult was a common practice. In turn, the god worshipped would offer its protection, special knowledge, and even the promise of "salvation" (life after death). The most popular mystery cults were those of Dionysus, Mithras, and Isis. Each of these gods had its own myths and rituals. Some of the rites and beliefs about these gods of the mystery cult may have influenced Christian beliefs about Jesus.

Greek Philosophy: Epicureanism, Stoicism, Cynicism

The numerous Greek philosophies, or systems of thought, formed a major feature of Hellenism. Epicureanism, stoicism, and cynicism were three of the more popular philosophies in the Roman Empire. Epicureanism, founded by Epicurus (341–270 BCE), stressed the material nature of all things, including the body and soul; thus, it held that immortality was only an illusion. According to Epicureanism, which stressed inner peace and harmony in this life, the gods of the other world have no need for a relationship with mere mortal humans. Stoicism, founded by Zeno (336–263 BCE), stressed the divine spark present in each human. Stoics believed that the universe was held together by a controlling principle called the *logos* ("word") and a vital spirit or soul called the *pneuma*. Stoics emphasized harmony between oneself and the universe and held the practice of virtue as the highest ideal. Cynicism, founded by Diogenes (404–325 BCE), emphasized living simply, according to nature. Cynics believed that a lack of possessions and a life of poverty would bring true freedom. Each of these diverse philosophical systems influenced the philosophy that underpinned the beliefs of Christians in the first-century world.

Jewish Apocalypticism

During the Hellenistic period, some Jews adopted the worldview of apocalypticism. This view was in response to the desperation and crisis that many Jews experienced during this period. Apocalypticism is rooted in the belief that reality is dualistic (fundamentally good and evil) and that everything is aligned with either good (God) or evil (sometimes identified as the devil). When Jews applied this worldview to their history, they began to see their own age as corrupted by evil. Over time, some Jews began to hope for an age to come in which God would again control the earthly realm. Jewish apocalypticism is evident in writings emerging from the Hellenistic period, some of which are part of the Hebrew Scriptures (for example, the books of Dan 7–12 and Zech 9–14), and others of which are not (for example, *1 Enoch* and the *Ascension of Moses*). Much of what Jesus says about the coming Son of Man (for example, Mk 13:24–27 and Matt 25:31–46) as well as the coming kingdom of God (for example, Matt 13:44–50) was influenced by apocalypticism and should be read in that light. The apocalyptic worldview is fundamental to a correct understanding of the Gospels.

Jewish Groups

Although most Jews were simply "people of the land," first-century Judaism, like first-century Greco-Roman religion and philosophy, was diverse and encompassed many different groups. These various groups point to a relatively small number of educated Jews who disagreed, sometimes vehemently, with each other on matters ranging from biblical interpretation to relations with the Romans. Although these groups were largely united in their monotheistic belief in Yahweh as the Lord of history and the universe, a reverence and adherence to the Mosaic Law, and a devotion to the Temple in their capital city of Jerusalem, they differed over many religious and political issues that affected the practical daily living of their Jewish faith. In this sense, we can speak of diverse forms of Judaism in the ancient Mediterranean.

The vast majority of first-century Palestinian Jews belonged to the *'Am ha-'aretz* (in Hebrew, the "people of the land"), Jewish men and women who lived in the countryside of Palestine. It was to this group Jesus directed his message and public ministry.

First-Century Palestinian Jewish Groups

'Am ha-'aretz	people of the land
Pharisees	interpreters of the written and oral Mosaic Law
Sadducees	conservative aristocracy
Scribes	trained scholars
Essenes	isolated community
Zealots and Sicarii	revolutionaries against Roman occupiers

The Jewish groups most commonly mentioned by the Gospel writers are the Pharisees, the scribes, and to a lesser extent, the Sadducees. The Pharisees thought of themselves as the descendents of the Hasidim, a resistance movement that originated in response to the oppressive rule of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, as mentioned earlier. In the Gospels, the Pharisees are most frequently depicted in opposition to Jesus. In fact, the New Testament depiction of the Pharisees is highly stylized, stereotyped, and caricatured. What little we do know of the Pharisees is that they were primarily an organization centered on social reform through fairly strict observance and enforcement of the Mosaic Law and the oral law that evolved from its interpretation. The Pharisees survived as a group into the second century CE, growing in power and influence especially after the First Jewish Revolt (66–73 CE). In the centuries following the Second Jewish Revolt (132–135 CE), the Pharisees evolved into rabbinic Judaism, which survives today.

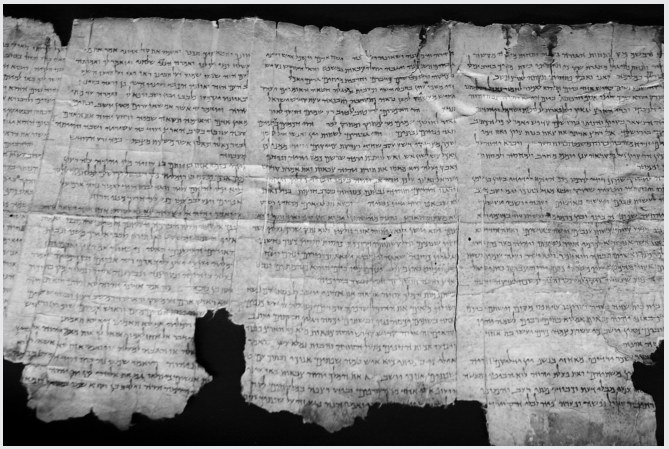
The scribes were the professional copyists and secretaries for the Pharisees and other civil and religious groups. Trained in reading and writing, the Jewish scribes were from the educated class and considered scholars of the Law. Like the Pharisees, scribes are often portrayed in opposition to Jesus.

The Sadducees, like the Pharisees, were a religious sect within Judaism. Beyond that, the Sadducees shared little with the Pharisees. Originating in the first century BCE, the Sadducees were fewer in number than the Pharisees. The Sadducees rejected the Pharisees' "oral law," the ongoing and evolving interpretation of the written Law. In fact, the Sadducees followed only the written Torah and did not believe in a future resurrection as did the Pharisees. The Sadducees were made up largely of wealthy aristocrats, landowners who worked in cooperation with the Roman rule of Palestine and exercised extensive control over the priesthood and the Temple in Jerusalem. With the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 CE by the Romans, the Sadducees quickly faded in influence and power. With the structures that empowered them destroyed, they did not survive beyond the first century CE.

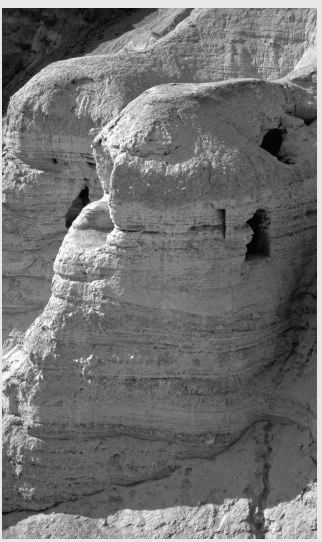
The Essenes are not mentioned directly by Jesus or the Gospel writers; however, they were an identifiable group in first-century Palestinian Judaism. This group consisted mainly of celibate Jewish males who lived in community, where they shared a life of fasting and meditation. In anticipation of the coming Messianic Age, this Jewish sect separated itself from the purity regulations and rituals practiced in the Jerusalem Temple. The Essenes originated about 140 BCE, in the period of the Maccabean Revolt, and were dispersed (or more likely slaughtered by the Romans) because of the First Jewish Revolt against Rome in 70 CE.

The Zealots and the Sicarii were two Jewish groups who actively, and violently, opposed Roman occupation of Palestine. The Gospel of Luke and Acts state that Simon, one of Jesus' original apostles, was a Zealot (Lk 6:15; Acts 1:13). The Zealots rallied around their "zeal" for the coming reign of God. Although present as a loose group throughout much of the first century, the Zealots cohered in response to the Jewish Revolt of 66–73 CE. The Sicarii, never directly mentioned in the Gospels, were even more radically violent than the Zealots, resorting to assassinations of Roman officials and even killing Jews who collaborated with the Romans. The Sicarii were known to kidnap officials to secure the release of fellow Sicarii from prison. Like the Zealots, the Sicarii used bloodshed to help facilitate the coming reign of God.

The Dead Sea Scrolls



The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947 is widely regarded as the greatest archeological find of the twentieth century. The scrolls of the Dead Sea were discovered in a series of eleven caves at Qumran located on the northwestern shore of the Dead Sea. Led by the "Teacher of Righteousness," the Essenes produced many writings, including the oldest copies of the Hebrew Scriptures, commentaries on the Scriptures, and their own community documents (e.g., *The Manual of Discipline*). The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls tells us much about this sect and its views toward other first-century Palestinian Jews.



Caves at Qumran in the West Bank, Middle East. The Dead Sea Scrolls were found in this area. *Above*: Dead Sea Scroll, part of Isaiah Scroll (Isa 57:17—59:9).

Jewish Institutions

First-century Palestinian Judaism was united around identifiable institutions: the city of Jerusalem, the Temple, the synagogues, and the Sanhedrin.

Jerusalem was the holiest city as well as the spiritual center for all Jews living in the Roman Empire, whether in Palestine or in the Diaspora outside Palestine. As Israel's capital city, Jerusalem held historical and theological significance. King David established Jerusalem as the capital city, and the Temple was housed there. Jerusalem and the Temple symbolized God's historic and covenantal relationship with Israel.

The Temple in Jerusalem was the center of the Jewish people's religious and political identity. It was Israel's center for sacrifice to Yahweh, and sacrifice was fundamental to the Jewish worship of Yahweh. Jews believed that God's holy presence resided in the Temple. In the Temple, the priests offered sacrifice at the altar of burnt offerings and incense at the golden altar. Numerous Palestinian and Diasporic Jews would pilgrimage to the Temple to celebrate the great annual festivals (for example, the feasts of Passover and of Unleavened Bread).

First-Century Palestinian Jewish Institutions

Jerusalem	traditionally the holiest city and spiritual center of the Jewish people
Temple	the location of Yahweh's abiding presence
Synagogue	a gathering place to read, study, and instruct in the Torah, as well as a community center for Jewish life
Sanhedrin	the supreme judicial council of the Jews

Jews living in the Diaspora would try to pilgrimage to Jerusalem at least once in their lifetime. The First Temple dated back to the days of King Solomon in the tenth century BCE and was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BCE, only to be rebuilt and dedicated as the Second Temple in 515 BCE upon the Jews' return from Babylonian Exile. Herod the Great began a massive renovation of the Temple in Jerusalem in 20–19 BCE, which was completed in 26–27 CE within the lifetime of Jesus. The Temple in Jerusalem not only provided greater financial stability for Jews (via the Temple tax) but also served as a symbol for Jews of their religious and political identity.

The synagogues (meaning "assembly" or "gathering") were part of the landscape in Palestine as well as in the Diaspora. The synagogues probably originated in the Babylonian Exile (587–538 BCE) when the Israelites no longer had Jerusalem and the Temple as their center of worship and faith. The reading and teaching of the Torah took place in these gatherings. The synagogues kept the transmission and practice of the Jewish faith institutionally alive for Jews inside and outside their Palestinian homeland. Synagogues survived the Babylonian Exile and became the local places of worship and faith instruction as well as the centers for the administration of daily affairs in first-century Jewish life.

Little is known about the Sanhedrin (council). Instituted in the third century BCE, the Sanhedrin is thought to have had the authority to rule on both religious and civil matters for the Jewish people. During his trial, Jesus is brought before the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem and condemned for blasphemy. In the Gospel narratives, we see that the Sanhedrin is composed of the Jewish religious leadership (for example, Sadducees, priests, scribes, and so on), with the High Priest of Jerusalem in charge of its deliberations.

With a better sense of the social, political, and religious realities of Second Temple Judaism, this chapter now takes a closer look at the time of Jesus and the New Testament Gospels.

The Time of Jesus and the Gospels

The writings in the New Testament were contributed to over a time span of about one hundred years. The contemporaries of Jesus—the Mediterranean people (mostly Jews) who saw, heard, and bore

witness to Jesus of Nazareth—left no written record of their experiences with Jesus. This is not to suggest that their impact is not present in parts of the New Testament. In this regard, it is important to realize that the ancient Mediterranean was an oral world. Very few people (perhaps 5 percent) had any practical need or ability to read and write.[6] People interacted almost exclusively with the spoken word. Thus Jesus' contemporaries passed on their experiences with Jesus orally, by word of mouth. This oral tradition was a major source of the written Gospels and the driving force behind the New Testament letters, including those by Paul and the later New Testament letter writers. The oral tradition that preceded the Gospels will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 7, "The Historical Jesus."

The first generation of Christians emerged after the death of Jesus. Most prominent among this first generation were the original disciples of Jesus. During his public ministry, Jesus amassed many disciples. Disciples were anyone who followed Jesus and accepted him as their teacher (rabbi). The terms *rabbi* and *disciple* mean "teacher" and "learner" (student), respectively. Exactly how many disciples Jesus had is not certain. They may have been in the hundreds, perhaps even the thousands. The numbers could have easily fluctuated at various times in Jesus' ministry. Unfortunately, the vast majority of Jesus' disciples are unknown to us. The apostles were disciples selected and sent by Jesus to preach and cast out demons. The Gospel writers list the apostles by name, often referring to them as "the Twelve." The names of the Twelve vary from list to list (compare, for example, Mk 3:13–19 with Lk 6:14–16). Many scholars suspect that the specific number twelve refers to the twelve tribes of Israel, symbolically brought together in Jesus' public ministry. Additionally, the number twelve may have been a part of the oral tradition, with particular names filled in differently by different Gospel authors. Consequently, scholars often understand "the twelve apostles" more as a literary image than a literal number. Furthermore, other New Testament writers include Paul, Barnabas, Junia, and others as apostles beyond the Twelve.

The first generation of Christians began the written record known today as the New Testament. Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians is thought to have been written about 50 CE. The thirteen

6. See Alan Millard, *Reading and Writing in the Time of Jesus* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), for an excellent resource on the issue of literacy in antiquity.

The First Christians

Jesus' contemporaries: Scholars debate the exact dates of Jesus' birth and death, but most agree that Jesus was born during the end of the reign of Herod the Great, 40–4 BCE. Herod began restoration of the Temple in Jerusalem in 20–19 BCE, which took forty-six years to complete (Jn 2:20). This would place Jesus' public ministry beginning about 27–28 CE and ending 30 CE, given John's report of a three-year public ministry for Jesus. The dates of 6 BCE and 30 CE are therefore commonly associated with the birth and death of Jesus.

First generation: The death of Jesus around 30 CE and the Jewish Revolt of 66–73 CE, with the destruction of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE and the fall of the Jewish city of Masada in 73 CE, are the events setting the parameters of the first generation, between 30 and 70 CE.

Second generation: The destruction of the Temple (70 CE) and the final piece of written literature in the New Testament (2 Pt, commonly dated around 125 CE) set the parameters of the second generation, approximately 70–125 CE.

letters attributed to Paul make up nearly half of the New Testament writings. Most scholars believe Paul actually wrote only seven of the thirteen letters, with the additional six attributed to the next generation of Christian letter writers. Paul's letters bear strong witness to the written record left behind by the first generation.

The majority of the books in the New Testament are written by the second generation, 70–125 CE. They are the four Gospels and Acts, the other New Testament letters (in addition to Paul's letters), the Letter to the Hebrews, and the book of Revelation. The four Gospels and Acts were produced between 70 and 100 CE. The later letters of the New Testament (Hebrews; James; Jude; 1, 2, and 3 John; 1 and 2 Peter) were produced between the years 80 and 125 CE. The book of Revelation was written in the final years of the first century.

The second generation found itself at a social, political, and religious crossroads. The first generation had passed. The city of

Jerusalem and the Temple had been destroyed by the Roman Empire. In the generations to come, Christianity would become more and more a Gentile phenomenon. What began with Jesus as a Jewish messianic movement would in time evolve into a separate religion.

As you can see, the New Testament writings bear witness to a span of more than one hundred years. The experiences and circumstances within this time span differed significantly. Even within the same generation, there were differences in not only circumstances but also perspectives. Jesus and the Gospels are understood better when taking into account the circumstances of those who told and composed the New Testament witness that survives to this day.

Thus far, this chapter has presented the basic narrative of the Hebrew Scriptures, as well as some of the social, political, and religious realities of the ancient Mediterranean world. Some attention was also given to the times of Jesus and the Gospels. In order to better understand the New Testament, knowledge of this historical and cultural context is important. Next examined are the methods scholars use to further discern who Jesus was and what the Gospel writers intended in telling his story and the story of the early Christian Church.

Summary: Understanding the World of Jesus

CORE CONCEPTS

- The narrative of the Hebrew Scriptures helped shape the world and viewpoint of Jesus and the Gospel writers.
- A vast social, political, and religious distance must be traveled in order to understand the world of Jesus and the Gospel writers.
- The formation of the Gospels took nearly one hundred years.

SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

- Anachronism and ethnocentrism are two common pitfalls when reading the Gospels.

Continued

Summary: Understanding the World of Jesus *Continued*

- Election, circumcision, covenant, law, and monotheism defined Jewish identity.
- Shame, honor, purity, and collective identity were important in Jesus' day.
- The widespread dissemination of Greek language, ideas, and customs is known as Hellenism.
- Jewish apocalypticism informed Jesus and the Gospel writers.

PART 2: INTERPRETING THE GOSPELS

Since the nineteenth century, scholars have used a variety of methods to study Jesus and the Gospels. Before examining several of these methods, attention is given to some assumptions scholars make about the formation of the Gospels in the first century, particularly about the literary relationship among Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Stages in the Formation of the Gospels

Although the chart below implies clear-cut stages in the formation of the Gospels, scholars acknowledge that these stages overlap in numerous, complex ways (for example, the oral traditions about Jesus

From Oral Kerygma to Written Gospel

Stage 1: 28–30 CE	begins with the public ministry (words and deeds) of Jesus
Stage 2: 30–70 CE	begins with the formation of the oral traditions (kerygma) about Jesus
Stage 3: 70–100 CE	begins with the formation of the written traditions (gospels) about Jesus

continued well past the writing of the Gospels). Nonetheless, one of the first major assumptions scholars make about the Gospels is that they passed through stages of development. The written Gospels of 70–100 CE are heavily dependent upon the early oral teaching and preaching of the words and deeds of Jesus (the kerygma), 30–70 CE. These oral traditions are rooted in, and grew from, the public ministry of Jesus from 28 to 30 CE.

It may seem strange that the ancient Mediterranean peoples, driven almost entirely by oral modes of communication, would have produced any written gospels at all. Two factors played a key role in the decision to put the oral tradition of Jesus in written form. First, the First Jewish Revolt of 66–73 CE likely had a major influence on the decision to write the story of Jesus. With Jerusalem and the Temple destroyed—two of the pillars of Judaism—there was concern for the long-term stability of Judaism and, by extension, Christianity. Thus, the First Jewish Revolt was one of the major motivations for committing the developing oral traditions about Jesus to writing. Second, as the original disciples and eyewitnesses of Jesus and his public ministry died, there would have been a desire to preserve the story of Jesus in written form, especially because Judaism was a religion already grounded in the written word of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Each of the Gospel writers wrote in Koine Greek, the common language of the people in the eastern portions of the Roman Empire in the formative years of the New Testament period. The decision to write the Gospels in Koine Greek and not, for example, in Aramaic, the native language of Jesus, or in Hebrew, the ancestral language of the Jews, reflects the setting of these authors in the Eastern Mediterranean, where Koine Greek had been the common language since the conquests of Alexander the Great. The rise of Hellenism (about 300 BCE) brought about the development of Koine Greek, although many Hellenistic philosophers continued to write in classical Greek.

The Synoptic Problem

A second major assumption about the Gospels has to do with their shared literary relationship. When the Gospel narratives are laid out side by side, the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke share much material in common. Because of this, Matthew, Mark, and Luke are

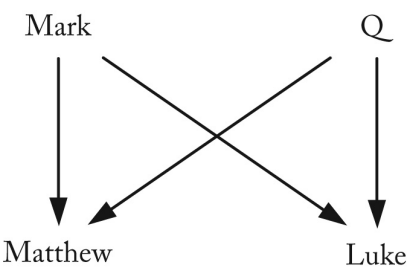
often termed the *Synoptic Gospels* (*syn-optic* meaning "seen together with the same eye"). This has naturally led to the question of the literary relationship among these three Gospels, commonly called the "Synoptic Problem." The "problem" is to account for the many similarities and differences among the three Gospels.

The overlapping materials in the Synoptic Gospels fall into various categories. There is material shared by all three Gospels (*Triple Tradition*), such as the story of the call of Levi (Mk 2:13–17; Matt 9:9–13; Lk 5:27–32). There is material shared between only Matthew and Luke (*Double Tradition*), for example, the Lord's Prayer (Matt 6:9–13; Lk 11:2–4). Then there is material found only in Matthew (*Special Matthew, M*), such as the visit of the magi (Matt 2:1–12). There also is material found only in Luke (*Special Luke, L*), such as the story of the resurrected Christ appearing to two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:13–35). The Gospel of John, finally, shares little material with the Synoptics, implying little or no literary relationship between John and the Synoptics and creating its own set of questions regarding sources.

Competing Theories, Markan Priority, and Q

Three basic "solutions" are offered to account for the literary relationship among Matthew, Mark, and Luke: the Two-Source theory, the Farrer theory, and the Griesbach theory. Central to each theory are two questions: (1) which Gospel was written first? and (2) what written sources were available to each of the Synoptic Gospel writers?

Two-Source Theory

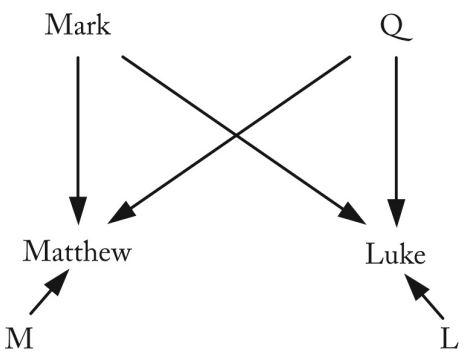


The most commonly accepted solution among scholars for solving the Synoptic Problem is called the Two-Source theory.

The Two-Source theory argues that Mark was the first written Gospel (Markan priority) and that Matthew and Luke used Mark as one of their written sources. Furthermore, Matthew and Luke had access to another source, Q (from the German word *Quelle*, meaning "source") for the writing of their Gospels. Thus Mark and Q are the theoretical "two sources" for Matthew and Luke. Postulating Mark and Q as sources for Matthew and Luke is attractive because together these two sources could account for all the material that Matthew and Luke share, much of it coming from Mark, the rest from Q (about 235 total verses).

The Two-Source theory also argues that Matthew and Luke wrote independently of each other. Often associated with the Two-Source theory is M and L material; that is, both Matthew and Luke have in addition to Mark and Q their own special material (about 30 percent of Luke is L material and about 20 percent of Matthew is M material). M material (for example, Matt 2:1–12, the visit of the magi) and L material (for example, Lk 24:13–35, the road to Emmaus) are thought to be a combination of written and oral sources, as well as material from the evangelists' own hands. The inclusion of the M and L material supplements the model of the Two-Source theory as follows:

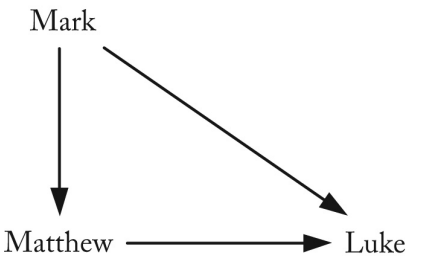
Two-Source Theory with M and L



The Two-Source theory is not without its critics. Two major competing theories regarding the literary relationship among Matthew, Mark, and Luke are the Farrer theory and the Griesbach theory.

The Farrer theory maintains the Markan priority of the Two-Source theory; however, because the Farrer theory argues that Luke knows both Mark and Matthew, the need for a Q-source is, in the words of Austin Farrer, "dispensed" with.[7]

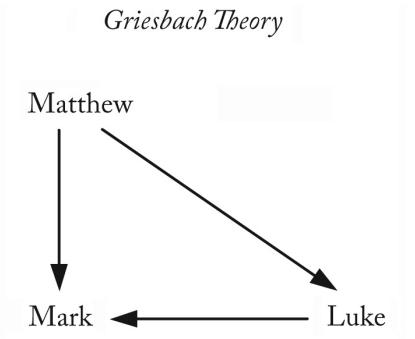
Farrer Theory



Scholars who object to the Farrer theory maintain that because Matthew and Luke use Mark so differently, it is quite difficult to see how Luke was influenced by Matthew's use of Mark. A third competing theory attempting to resolve the Synoptic Problem is the Griesbach theory, named after J. J. Griesbach in the early eighteenth

7. See Austin Farrer, "On Dispensing with Q," in *Studies in the Gospels: Essays in Honor of R. H. Lightfoot* (ed. D. E. Nineham; Oxford: Basil Black, 1951), 55–88. Two of the more prominent Farrer theory advocates today are Michael D. Goulder and Mark Goodacre. See Goulder, *Luke: A New Paradigm* (JSNTS Sup 20; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989) and Goodacre, *The Case against Q: Studies in Markan Priority and the Synoptic Problem* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2002). In a series of articles from the *Journal of Biblical Literature (JBL)*, Goulder has established himself as a credible voice of opposition to the Q hypothesis: see Michael D. Goulder, "Is Q a Juggernaut?" *JBL* 115 (1996): 667–81; "Self-Contradiction in the IQP," *JBL* 118 (3, 1999): 506–17; "The Derrenbacker-Kloppenborg Defense," *JBL* 121 (2002): 331–36. Goulder wrote this 2002 *JBL* article in reaction to Derrenbacker and Kloppenborg's 2001 article, "Self-Contradiction in the IQP? A Reply to Michael Goulder," *JBL* 120 (2001): 57–76.

century. Griesbach is credited with producing the first "synopsis," laying parallel Gospel accounts side by side for comparison. After his production of the Gospel synopsis, Griesbach offered a version of a fourth-century solution to the Synoptic Problem: namely, Matthew wrote first, then Luke edited Matthew, and finally Mark condensed both Matthew and Luke.



As the historical-critical methods of biblical interpretation grew throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and Markan priority gained solid ground, the Griesbach theory has for the most part lost support, despite William Farmer's attempts to revive it in the 1960s.[8]

The majority of scholars today embrace the Two-Source theory as the most satisfactory solution to the Synoptic Problem. Furthermore, nearly all scholars support the Markan priority; that is, Mark was the first of the three written Gospels in the New Testament.

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8. See William R. Farmer, *The Synoptic Problem: A Critical Analysis* (2nd ed.; Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1976). Further modern advocates of the Griesbach theory include David Dungan, *A History of the Synoptic Problem: The Canon, the Text, the Composition, and the Interpretation of the Gospels* (New York: Doubleday, 1999) and *Beyond the Q Impasse: Luke's Use of Matthew* and Alan J. McNicol, David L. Dungan, and David B. Peabody, eds., *Demonstration by the Research Team of the International Institute for Gospel Studies* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity International Press, 1996).

Three Competing Theories on the Synoptic Gospels

One theory on the literary relationship among Matthew, Mark, and Luke is the Griesbach theory. Originated in the early eighteenth century by J. J. Griesbach (1745–1812), and revived by William Farmer in the 1960s, this theory holds that Matthew wrote first and that Mark is a conflation (blending) of Matthew and Luke. This view of "Matthean priority" dates back to the North African church father Augustine in the late fourth century CE.

The most widely accepted theory on the literary relationship among the Synoptic Gospels is the Two-Source theory. Originating in the early nineteenth century, this theory argues that Mark wrote first ("Markan priority") and that Matthew and Luke used Mark along with another unknown source, Q. The Two-Source theory was expanded by B. H. Streeter (1874–1937) to include M and L (material found only in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke) as additional sources for Matthew and Luke.

Recent debate about the hypothetical Q-source has led to the Farrer theory. Originated by Austin Farrer (1904–1968) in an article published in 1951, "On Dispensing with Q," Farrer maintained the Markan priority but argued that Luke knew and used the Gospel of Matthew as a source for his Gospel, thus, in effect, "dispensing" with much of what was thought to be Q. The Farrer theory has gained some scholarly support in recent years.

Modern Methods for Interpreting the Gospels

Modern methods for interpreting the New Testament Gospels are rooted in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the wake of the eighteenth-century Age of Enlightenment and Age of Reason in Europe and America, Western culture began thinking differently about many things, including the nature of history and faith itself. The period of the Enlightenment and Reason had a profound impact on Western perceptions of reality, including of the Bible itself. It is in this context that the contemporary methodological approaches to the Gospels were first developed.

Today there exist many different methods for interpreting the Gospels. Most of these approaches tend to fall into one of three categories: *historical-critical, literary*, or *ideological*.

Historical-Critical Approaches

Methods for interpreting the Gospels that attempt to better understand the Gospels' historical development and sources are referred to as historical-critical methods. Chief among these are *source criticism, form criticism*, and *redaction criticism*.

Source critics ask the questions: What were the written and oral sources available to the Gospel writers, and in what ways did these writers use the sources for the composition of their Gospels? The three major theories attempting to solve the Synoptic Problem (what is the literary relationship among Matthew, Mark, and Luke) are examples of source criticism in action.

Whereas source critics are interested in stage three of the development of the Gospels (that is, the written traditions about Jesus), form critics focus on the oral traditions about Jesus. Form critics are less interested in the Gospels as a whole and more interested in the individual units (pericopes) and distinct literary forms that make up the Gospel narratives. The Gospels contain many different literary forms (for example, miracle stories, parables, and genealogies). Form critics seek to trace how and where these forms developed and circulated within the oral traditions that existed before the written Gospel or among the written sources incorporated into the Gospels. One presupposition of form criticism is that early traditions about Jesus were preserved because they served a particular purpose in the *Sitz im Leben* (German for "setting in life") of the community and experiences of the early Christians. Accordingly, form critics ask the questions: What specific literary form (genre) is a given unit and in what *Sitz im Leben* did the original Christians use the pericope (for example, in liturgical worship, baptismal preparation, preaching, and so on)?

Redaction criticism works with the written Gospels in the form we have them today. In several European languages, including German, *redaction* means "editing" and seeks to understand better the editorial process by which the written Gospels came together in their final form. Redaction critics build upon the theories of the source

and form critics and are dependent upon their work. Redaction critics explain why a Gospel writer uses and edits the available sources (written and oral) in the composition of his Gospel. In doing so, redaction critics can better understand the theology and worldview of the Gospel author. Whereas source and form criticism tend to regard the evangelists as passive compilers of traditional materials, redaction criticism recognizes the authors' active roles in shaping their presentations of Jesus in consideration of particular theological and pastoral concerns. A further implication of this advance in scholarship—recognizing the evangelists as authors—may be seen in literary approaches to the Gospels.

Literary Approaches

The popularity and success of redaction criticism in the twentieth century have led to continued efforts by biblical scholars to work with the Gospel narratives in the final forms we have today. Literary approaches to the Gospels are less interested in the historical-critical issues associated with the formation and oral transmission of the Gospels and instead focus exclusively on the Gospels as narratives.

Two current literary approaches to understanding the Gospels are *narrative criticism* and *reader-response criticism*. These methods have been developed in recent decades and bring a whole new set of questions to the Gospels. Narrative critics look at various features of the Gospels such as character, plot, and setting, as well as bring attention to rhetorical dimensions such as irony and symbolism. Narrative critics ask such questions as: What is the role and function of the narrator of the Gospel story, and how are characters developed in the unfolding plot of the Gospel? Reader-response critics are interested in examining how readers interact with the Gospel narratives. Reader-response critics ask questions such as: How is the reader being manipulated by the text, and is there a "correct" way of reading and interpreting the plot?

Ideological Approaches

Two of the major ideological approaches to the Gospels, *feminist* and *cross-cultural analyses*, examine the ideological biases and presuppositions that underlie contemporary interpretation. Unlike the historical-critical and literary approaches to the Gospels, which employ

a clearly defined methodology, ideological approaches ask a different set of questions. Feminist criticism examines the Gospels in ways that seek to uncover the patriarchal bias embedded within the Gospel narratives. Cross-cultural criticism examines how people from different cultures today read and interpret the Gospels, depending on their social, political, and religious context. Cross-cultural critics ask such questions as: How do African Americans tend to read the Gospel of Mark, and in what ways do Western cultures read the Gospels differently than Middle Eastern cultures?

The second part of this chapter has examined a variety of assumptions that biblical scholars employ as they examine the New Testament Gospels, as well as many of the modern methods for interpreting the Gospels. Shifting now to an analysis of each of the New Testament Gospels, these scholarly assumptions and methodological approaches will help to interpret the Gospels within their proper historical, theological, and literary contexts.

Summary: Interpreting the Gospels

CORE CONCEPTS

- The three stages of development of the New Testament Gospels were overlapping and complex.
- The Synoptic Problem involves addressing the similarities and differences among Matthew, Mark, and Luke.
- Three possible solutions for solving the Synoptic Problem are the Two-Source theory, the Farrer theory, and the Griesbach theory. Most scholars favor the Two-Source theory.
- Modern methods for interpreting the Gospels include historical, literary, and ideological approaches.

SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

- The Gospels were originally written in Koine Greek, the common language in eastern portions of the Roman Empire.
- *Synoptic* means "seen together with the same eye."

Continued

Summary: Interpreting the Gospels *Continued*

- Most scholars today believe that Mark was the first written New Testament Gospel.
- Modern methods for interpreting the Gospels emerged in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Questions for Review

1. What are anachronism and ethnocentrism and why are they to be avoided in reading the Gospels?
2. Why is the figure of King David (circa 1000 BCE) important for understanding the Hebrew Scriptures and depictions of Jesus in the New Testament Gospels?
3. What dates and events defined the first one hundred years of the New Testament period?
4. What are some examples of the social distance needed to travel between the people of the ancient Mediterranean and twenty-first-century readers in order to better understand the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament Gospels?
5. What is Hellenism and how did it affect the Palestinian world of Jesus?
6. Name the major Palestinian Jewish groups in the first century CE.
7. Describe how Jerusalem and the Temple have been the center of Jewish identity.
8. Explain how the formation of the New Testament Gospels occurred in stages.
9. What is the Synoptic Problem and how does the Two-Source theory address this problem?
10. What are some of the modern approaches to interpreting the Gospels?

Questions for Reflection

1. What are some of the biggest challenges in avoiding an anachronistic and ethnocentric reading of the Gospels?
2. In what ways (social, political, or religious) does the modern world differ from that of the ancient Mediterranean?
3. What insights do the theories addressing the Synoptic Problem offer about the formation of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke?
4. Of the modern approaches to interpreting the New Testament Gospels, which interests you the most and why?

Recommendations for Further Reading

Goodacre, Marc. *The Synoptic Problem: A Way through the Maze*. London and New York: T & T Clark, 2001.

Goodacre challenges some of the basic assumptions that underlie many of our theories on the literary relationship between Matthew, Mark, and Luke, often termed the "Synoptic Problem." Maintaining Markan priority and arguing against the existence and necessity of Q, Goodacre presents an intriguing and viable alternative to the standard Two-Source theory that many Gospel scholars take for granted. This book is written with the undergraduate in mind, providing summaries, charts, and tables that make the "maze" of the Synoptic Problem manageable for the beginning student.

Johnson, Sarah Iles, ed. *Religions of the Ancient World: A Guide*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 2004.

This book offers a wide range of topics and scholarly perspectives on religions in the ancient world. Presented in three major categories—encountering ancient religions, histories behind various ancient religions, and key topics—this book covers an enormous amount of ground and material. Under the category of encountering ancient religions, topics such as monotheism, polytheism, and magic are covered. Under the category of histories, ancient religions, including those found in Egypt, Iran, Greece, and early Christianity generally, are covered. Key topics include sacred time and space, rites of passage, and religion and politics.

Malina, Bruce J. *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology*. 3rd ed. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.

Malina provides students with a solid and readable introduction to the cultural context of the ancient Mediterranean in the New Testament

period. Malina presents helpful categories for students (for example, honor and shame, kinship and marriage, clean and unclean) that can be used to gain insights into the cultures and peoples who occupied the world of the New Testament period. This is a widely read book by those taking a social-scientific approach to understanding the New Testament.

Roetzel, Calvin J. *The World That Shaped the New Testament*. Rev. ed. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002.

An engaging treatment of the political, social, institutional, economic, and religious issues of the Second Temple period (515 BCE–70 CE) that gave rise to the New Testament. This is an excellent resource for beginning students who wish to more fully understand the forces that shaped the writings of the New Testament.

Tuckett, Christopher. *Reading the New Testament: Methods of Interpretation*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987.

This is one of the best recent books introducing students to various historical-critical approaches to studying the New Testament. Using primarily examples from the Gospels, Tuckett presents many of the basic aims of these methods and introduces newer methods for interpreting the Gospels that emerged in the last decades of the twentieth century (for example, structuralism and canonical criticism).