

Course Companion for AS / A Level Year 1 Edexcel Religious Studies

Paper 3: New Testament Studies

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Answers to Quick Quizzes

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Teacher's Introduction

This resource provides comprehensive, student-friendly coverage of the AS / A Level Religious Studies Paper 3: New Testament Studies.

The material is covered in the order given in the specification:

- **Social, historical and religious context of the New Testament** (prophecy regarding the first century and the significance of the context for the life and work of Jesus)
- **Texts and interpretation of the person of Jesus** (the prologue in John; titles and selected 'I am' sayings in John; miracles and signs)
- **Interpreting the text and issues of relationship, purpose and authorship** (interpretation and authorship of the fourth Gospel)

Each subtopic has a variety of **'Starter Activities'**, **'Activities'** and **'Discussion Questions'** to consolidate knowledge and stimulate class discussion. There are also **'Exam Preparation'** written activities to indirectly prepare students for the exam.

Also included are **'Quick Quiz'** sections throughout each topic, which should provide self-check comprehension and help students remember key information. **Answers** for the **Quick Quizzes** are provided at the back of the resource.

Key terms have been defined at the start of the resource in a handy glossary for students to refer to as needed.

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INTRODUCTION TO NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES

The study of the New Testament is a fascinating and evolving study, focusing on the life of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, who is the figure of central importance within the Christian faith. It is used for devotional study by Christians and churches worldwide; however, studying the text is quite different from studying them in a religious sense.

The New Testament gospels are widely regarded as being among the best sources for reconstructing the historical accuracy of the life of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whose teachings converted millions to following his teachings through the spread of the gospels and the church. However, dating these texts is incredibly hard and still to this day has not reached a consensus among scholars. Indeed, the earliest dating for these gospels begins with the Gospel of Mark, which is dated approximately AD 70.

It is not that the stories of the gospels were not being passed around, but in the early days of Christianity, the transmission of stories was far more common than the sharing of written documents. It was only later that these texts were not written down for years after Jesus' death. The writers of the gospels felt the need to write down some of what Jesus taught and the spread of the message of Jesus and felt the need to write down some of what Jesus taught to ensure that the spread of the messages was in keeping with that which Jesus had said with them.

This does, however, pose a problem for the reliability of the texts – the time between the death of Christ and their writing opens up the accounts to at best the blurring of memories and second-hand accounts, and at worst open changes due to theological or political biases held by the writers at the time of the accounts being recorded. This affects the reliability of the accounts as historical documents.

Beyond the Canonical Gospels too, there are further texts which are analysed within New Testament studies from the *Antiquities of the Jews*, a historical text written by Jew Flavius Josephus, which gives a few references to the historical person of Jesus. Josephus himself is a well-respected Jewish historian whose *Antiquities* is one of the few non-Christian texts that modern scholars have to consult regarding the life of Christ. While Jesus is not the main feature in his works (as he was, after all, a Jew who did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah), there is mention enough of Jesus to warrant interest from biblical scholarship. There is reference to Jesus also in the words of Tacitus, a Roman historian who mentions Jesus; however, this is mostly towards the end of explaining this new group called 'Christians'.

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KEY TERMS

Term	Definition
Synoptic	The first three gospels which have an interconnected relationship.
Canonical	All four gospels included within the canon of the Church: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.
Hellenism	The synthesis of Greco-Roman culture with the Jewish culture of the time.
BC	Before Christ; used as a measurement of time before the year 1.
AD	This stands for 'Anno Domini', which means 'The Year of Our Lord'. It is a measurement of time after the year 1 in the Christian era.
Apostles	A group of early Christian missionaries largely made up of the original disciples. The authorship of some of the gospels is attributed to some apostles.
Disciples	A group of 12 men who followed Jesus during his lifetime according to the New Testament.
Logos	Greek word meaning 'Word'; in context referring to Jesus as the Word.
Torah	The Jewish holy Scriptures.
Messianic	Belief or relation of something to the Jewish concept of a coming Messiah.
Judea	The province in which Jesus lived and preached which was under Roman control.
Exegesis	Meaning literally 'to draw out'; this refers to an academic and analytical study of a text, particularly a Scripture.
Gentile	Any person who was not ethnically or religiously Jewish.
Qumran	A geographical location in modern-day West Bank.
Sanhedrin	A form of Jewish court utilised at the time of Jesus.

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TOPIC 1: SOCIAL, HISTORICAL RELIGIOUS CONTEXT OF TESTAMENT

One of the most important keys to understanding and interpreting the gospels was understanding the **context** in which these events may have happened and the context in which the gospel writers wrote them down. Scriptural context is also very important as the gospels contain references to sections of the Jewish Holy Scriptures.

The gospels themselves were not written until many years after the death of Christ, dating being AD 50. Before they were recorded on paper, they were passed via oral tradition from the time; vast swathes of Jewish ideology and 'Scripture' were passed down through the centuries. Therefore, the way in which the events of Jesus' life and ministry are recorded are heavily influenced by the social, historical and religious context of the time in which he lived and preached and the gospel writers lived.

Many of the images and allusions used by the gospel writers were heavily provocative to those who would be very familiar with the Scripture references, so the small references to the Torah would have invoked an understanding in those audiences that modern readers may not have.

1.1 PROPHECY REGARDING THE MESSIAH



STARTER ACTIVITY

1. In a group, or pairs, write or print out Isaiah 53. Circle and annotate the Scriptures that you think it could be argued that Jesus fulfilled the Messianic Prophecies.
2. Think about where these ideas came from, and write down any thoughts you have on the source of your knowledge.

The writers of the gospels were all early Christians. This means that they were contemporary with the events they were writing about, probably with knowledge of traditional Judaism. The stories of Jesus were oral tradition until they wanted to write these down to preserve and spread the stories on paper – and to make the case for Jesus as the Messiah as foretold within the Jewish scriptures. A lot of work had to be made in order to convey this that would provoke understanding and faith. For this reason, the gospels are peppered with references to Old Testament prophecy.

The Suffering of Servant of Isaiah

Many Christians, and indeed the writers of the gospels, allude to Jesus as being the Servant prophesied about in the Book of Isaiah in the Old Testament.

Isaiah 53:4–6 states that:

*Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God,
stricken by him and afflicted.*

***But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed***

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The gospel writers frame the passion of Christ within this narrative throughout all the suffering and dying of Jesus through the method of crucifixion as fulfilment of an example of the framing of Jesus' ministry within the context of the Suffering Servant. Matthew 8:16–17 contains an example of Jesus' power of casting out of demons.

*When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, with a word and healed all the sick. **This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: 'He took up our infirmities and bore our diseases.'***

Note how the event is described, and then is immediately followed by the frame. Matthew wishes the readership to understand the text within. The miracle is described and quoted to contextualise what they believe to be the fulfilment of Isaiah. This is an important theological point being made by the writers that would make a stark statement to those who they believed to be the person of Jesus.

This idea of Jesus being the Suffering Servant is proclaimed once more in the New Testament in the book of Acts (Acts 8:27), which is widely believed by most biblical scholars to have been written by the writer of the Gospel of Luke. This occurs when Philip the evangelist approaches an Ethiopian eunuch, who is reading the passage from Isaiah.

R Brown highlights the Lamb of God imagery within the Gospel of John as underlining a direct relation to the prophecy in Isaiah, aligning him as a 'suffering servant who was slain'. Isaiah 53:7 states, 'He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was like a lamb that is led to slaughter'.

Morna Hooker argues that the presence of the allusion to the Suffering Servant of Isaiah adds credence to the reliability that Jesus self-identified in this way. She argues that the theological development of this parallel is made. The presence of the idea in the Gospels can be down to a wish to faithfully record the words of Jesus; however, with the writers' understanding of the allusions being made there was not a theological development of themselves.

She identifies that Jesus saw himself as 'The One true Israelite who is able to accept suffering for people'¹ (*Jesus and the Servant*). This, she argues, is evidenced by his own use of the word 'servant' stating that 'the similarity in meaning is so great there is little doubt Jesus had those words'.² (referring to Mark 3:27). W H Bellinger agrees, summing up his argument as 'the genesis of this new exegesis of Isaiah 53 lay with Jesus'.³

Bellinger points to specific word choice in Matthew which illustrates the presentation of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, stating that a good example can be found in 27:41–43:

In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him, saying, 'but he can't save himself! He's the king of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, if he really believes in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, "I am the Son of God."'

Bellinger states that the writer of Matthew, 'characterises the chief priests, scribes and Pharisees used to describe the wicked in Psalm 22:8 and Wisdom 2:10–20 (an echo of Isaiah 53) as these religious leaders in Jerusalem are actually the wicked who persecute the righteous'.⁴ Isaiah 53, that is, Jesus'.⁴

Jewish scholars offer alternative interpretations of this passage in Isaiah: that the suffering servant is not the Jewish people and the nation of Israel. Indeed, as a collective group, they are at the hands of many different groups throughout the world and throughout history.

¹ Hooker, Morna, *Jesus and the Servant: The Influence of the Servant Concept of Deutero-Isaiah in the New Testament*.

² Hooker, Morna, *Jesus and the Servant: The Influence of the Servant Concept of Deutero-Isaiah in the New Testament*.

³ William H Bellinger, William R Farmer, *Jesus and the Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 and Christian Origins*.

⁴ William H Bellinger, William R Farmer, *Jesus and the Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 and Christian Origins*.

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interpretation which makes logical sense to those who do not believe in the messianic potential issue with the 'sinless' nature of the servant, when one looks at history of Jewish people as being unprovoked – you may think of the Holocaust as the most obvious but there are many other examples too, such as the pogroms in nineteenth-century Russia and the Expulsion in England in 1290.

This is a corporate (collective) understanding of the suffering servant, rather than the Christian belief that this prophecy is fulfilled through the person of Jesus.

The Line of David

One of the major messianic prophecies in the Old Testament, Isaiah 11:1–2, makes Jewish belief the coming Messiah would be descended from the line of David. This verse, Isaiah 11:1–2, a Torah verse prophesying about the coming of a Messiah which states the

*Then a shoot will spring from the **stem of Jesse***
And a branch from his roots will bear fruit.
The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him*

***Jesse** is the father of **David**; this verse references Jesse; however, it represents the idea of the line of David. While this knowledge would need to be clarified to a gentile, or indeed a modern audience, to a Jewish readership and community, the meaning would be incredibly clear.

Thus, the opening of Matthew establishes clearly through a genealogy Jesus' status as being descended from the line of David. From the very opening chapter, it is established that this is a person who fulfils this criterion of messiahship which is given in Isaiah.

Firstly, the important role of David within Judaism must be made abundantly clear. The tale of King David found in 1 Samuel and 2 Samuel is intrinsically important to the Jewish faith and religious-cultural memory. David was a lowly shepherd and the youngest son of Jesse, but was anointed by the prophet Samuel on the instruction of God according to the Hebrew Scriptures. His early reign is remembered as Godly and just, resulting in his reign being remembered as a Jewish golden age. While towards the end of his reign the Scriptures record him including sexual sin and murder, he is still remembered as one of the greatest rulers of Israel.

To align oneself with the house of David was to align oneself with a figure closely associated with holiness. King David is an important Jewish figure, appointed by God to rule, and holds a great respect and reverence among those of the Jewish faith even today. This reverence is reflected in the prophetic statement of the coming Messiah being stated to be of the line of David. The statement about the nature of who the writer of Matthew wished to portray Jesus as is clear.

Jesus is stated to be of the line of David within the opening chapter of Matthew's Gospel. This is an opening statement of the importance of the person of Jesus, as being of the line of David. It is notably traced back through the line of Joseph, the betrothed father, and Mary, the mother. As the gospels state that Mary was a virgin when Jesus was conceived, some have questioned the legitimacy of tracing Jesus' lineage back through the line of Joseph, as he was not biologically his father. However, within the context of first-century Jewish culture, this was not considered a problem. The gospel clearly states that Joseph declared Jesus as his son, which would render him considered to be legitimately of the line of David. Indeed, Brown states that 'Joseph, by acknowledging Jesus as his child by taking the name David because Joseph of the House of David acknowledges him as his child by taking the name'.

⁵ Brown, Raymond E, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (1997)

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Some scholars have stipulated that because the genealogy of women was not recorded, it could be argued that Mary could have been of the line of David; however, as in the case of her relative, Elizabeth, who is described as being of the priestly tribe of Levite. This could be a Levite, and its inclusion in the gospel could underline the significance of Jesus as being of the line of David and the line of priests.

R Brown makes the argument that during this time period, a genealogy was less viewed as a legitimate historical recording of lineage, but rather as a form of political or social statement. Thus, he argued, it mattered less to the writer of Matthew whether or not Jesus was actually descended from David, but to state this in the form of the written genealogy was an important statement about who he believed the person of Jesus to be.

He also argues that Luke specifically makes use of Jesus being of the line of David to make a point about the importance of the birth of Christ in Bethlehem, underlining Jesus' royal heritage to underline the importance of his birth. He argues as below:

The events Luke will describe actually took place in a small town in Palestine, but by setting them in a Roman census Luke symbolizes the importance of the royal heritage of Israel and ultimately for the world Empire. The announcement that there is born in the city of David a Saviour who is Messiah and Lord' (2:11), proclamation⁶

The Messianic Secret

This term refers to the motif repeated throughout the Gospel of Mark in which Jesus instructs his disciples that the knowledge of himself as Messiah must be kept a secret. This is found in Mark 1:43–45, 4:11 and 8:29–30. This poses a potential problem for Christ. If Jesus is the Messiah, then it does not logically follow that this would mean that Jesus came to save all mankind, then it does not logically follow that this would mean that Jesus came to save all mankind.

There is a variety of reasons why biblical scholars think this is included in Mark. Some scholars, such as Wrede, actually said, then **Wrede** supposes that this could have been for one of two reasons. It was necessary for Jesus' status to be kept a secret as this would draw less attention to him about his work without the hindrance of attention. By avoiding the attention he was able to move around freely and perform his miracles and works with minimal difficulty. However, the fact that the gospels have documented throughout the large crowds that Jesus attracted, that theologically perhaps this instruction could be put down to the reason that it was Jesus to reveal himself as Messiah.

More likely, however, Wrede argues, that this was a later addition to the gospels, not in the original texts, or indeed a misremembering of the instructions of Jesus. Indeed, Brown's argument stipulated that the reason for the 'historically implausible' messianic secret was that *early traditions that were non-messianic into a proclamation of Jesus as the Messiah* was made by Brown.

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⁶ Brown, Raymond E, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (1997)

⁷ Brown, Raymond E, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (1997)

Dennis MacDonald argues that perhaps the inclusion of the messianic secret in the demonstration of the Hellenistic culture in which the gospels were written. He discusses the messianic secret and aspects of Homer's *Odyssey*; should this theory be true, it would demonstrate well the extent to which the context in which the gospels were written affected and permeated the texts.

Regardless of the function of the inclusion of the sections of text in which Jesus wishes his followers to keep his Messiah status a secret, by the end of his life it is clear that many believe him to be the Messiah within the context of what is recorded within the gospels.

DISCUSSION

1. What reasons could there be for the messianic secret in Mark?
2. Why do you think the messianic secret is not in Matthew or Luke?
3. What do you think the writer(s) of Mark?

Matthew's Proof Texts and Birth Narratives

This is a series of excerpts from religious scripture (the Old Testament, more commonly known as the Torah) which are repeated throughout the Prologue of Matthew to support the report of Jesus' conception, birth and life with passages of scripture regarding the Messiah. Matthew self-fulfils his own prophecy by writing the proof texts to show how Jesus has come 'in fulfilment of the Scriptures'.

When placed within context, these demonstrate Matthew's theological agenda – the writer of Matthew wishes to make one thing very clear: he views Jesus as the Messiah foretold in the Jewish Scriptures. He links his accounts of the birth and infancy of Christ with the following important pieces of Jewish Scripture from the Torah to support his claims and underline Jesus as Messiah:

- **The virgin birth** → This is the concept that Jesus was conceived through the traditional carnal method of procreation. He is born of a virgin through the power of the Holy Spirit, begotten of God and wholly unique. This is linked with **Isaiah 7:14** which states, *'And you, O virgin, will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call his name Immanuel.'*
- **The birth in Bethlehem** → This refers to the account in Matthew that Jesus was born in Bethlehem in modern-day Palestine. This is linked with **Micah 5:2–4** which states, *'Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come one who will rule over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times. Therefore Israel will return in the time when she who is in labour bears a son, and the rest of his brothers return to him, and he will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. They will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth.'*
- **The holy family in Egypt** → This is the idea that Mary and Joseph fled with Jesus to Egypt to escape the massacre of the innocent children as recorded to have been ordered by the King of the Jews to survive a rival King of the Jews. This is linked to Hosea 11:1 which states, *'When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.'*
- **Massacre of the newborns under Herod** → This is an instance recorded in Matthew that Herod the Great was informed that there would be a new King of the Jews. In response, he ordered that all the infants in the region who were male be murdered. This is linked with Jeremiah 31:15 which states, *'This is what the Lord says: "A voice is heard in Ramah, mourning and weeping, for Benjamin is being taken away, for he is refusing to be comforted, because they are no more."*

These links are vitally important to understanding the purposes of the writer of Matthew. The Gospel of Matthew is thought to have been written around AD 70, and to have been written for a primary audience of Jewish Christians. The context is hugely important when interpreting the proof texts in the birth narrative. At the time the Gospel of Matthew was written, the Jewish community in Jerusalem were suffering persecution at the hands of the Roman occupation. The **Temple in AD 70** left the Jewish community reeling. The temple was the focal point of Jewish life, and to a large extent it was a holy site which was integrally tied to Jewish identity. The destruction of the temple left Jewish people in the region with somewhat of an identity crisis. This is the context in which the Gospel of Matthew was written.

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Matthew are constructing their gospel. In this light, the heavy links with important events demonstrate the purposes of the gospel writer. By linking various parts of his birth narrative, Matthew is making an emphatic and repeated statement that Jesus is the promised Messiah, Christianity as a solution to the identity crisis of Judaism post AD 70.

Matthew's efforts to establish Jesus as the Messiah through the birth narratives and the prophecy concerning the Messiah as coming from the region of Nazareth. This fits the Nazarene, whose family home was Nazareth. Therefore, Matthew presents a Jesus with origins of the Messiah. However, the prophecy which Matthew references is found nowhere in the Old Testament, the books of which made up the Jewish Scriptures. One plausible explanation for this was that this was a facet of the oral tradition of the time, and was simply a belief held by some Jews due to oral tradition but was not sourced from the Torah.

M Hooker argues that the birth narratives in Matthew are indicative of the message which the gospel writer wished to convey throughout the entirety of this gospel; that Jesus as the Messiah for a Jewish audience is the main theme set up in the exposition of his gospel by the writers and is continued throughout.

Furthermore, as discussed previously the Davidic line was important for the Messiah. Jesus' birth being situated in Bethlehem, the city of King David's birth, further underlines the person of Jesus in the context of the line of David.

DID YOU KNOW?

The massacre of the innocents in Bethlehem is not recorded anywhere in the Bible. While this seems to be remembered as having occurred by Herod the ruler, so perhaps it could be argued that violent rulings were recorded by Josephus, famous Jewish historian. There is no mention of this. This is interesting as he recorded a large number of events. Therefore, it is generally accepted by scholars that this event has a low likelihood.

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SPOTLIGHT ON SCHOLARS

The two main scholars to focus on here are **Morna Hooker** and **Raymond Brown**.

Hooker discusses Matthew's birth narratives in her work *Beginnings: Keys to the Gospel*. She argues that Matthew's birth narratives function as the 'prophetic key', revealing the Gospel to present Christ as first and foremost the Messiah who was prefigured in the Old Testament. This contrasts with what she terms the 'dramatic key' of the Marcan account and the 'spiritual key' of Luke.

Hooker draws on the slower start to Matthew's Gospel in comparison to Mark. She takes the time to specifically go through the story of Jesus' conception and birth, and how it relates to what we have seen with the history of Israel and Judaism. This slower, more detailed approach highlights the importance with which the writer of Matthew viewed this part of the story and the themes it contained.

Based on this, Hooker believes that the bookends of Matthew (that is, the beginning and the end) reveal more about the nature and intent of the Gospel than about the Gospel's content. Her greater emphasis on Jesus and his place within Jewish history, tradition and culture, and the Gospel in this way, Hooker argues, Matthew is making a statement about the beginning of Jesus' life, specifically pertaining to the genealogy.

While Hooker argues the birth narratives may not be historically accurate, she treats them as important in such a way as they reveal important facets about what the writer of Matthew believed the person of Jesus to be. This would reveal attitudes of the time and the issues it was facing. The reason why the text was written in such a way may be more to do with interpretation than what is actually written.

Raymond Brown takes a similar view to Hooker regarding the historically accuracy of the birth narratives. He points towards the likely historical inaccuracy of the period of the birth by Herod the Great. This massacre is posed in Matthew 2:19–23 as being fulfilled in the story of Moses in the book of Exodus. He argues that this was probably added in at a later date to the Gospel to draw the picture of Jesus as a new Moses, and roots this idea in the beginning in the birth narratives.

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Quick Quiz

1. What is meant by the term 'Messiah'?
2. What is meant by the Suffering Servant of Isaiah?
3. Where is the source of this idea found?
4. What is the significance of the lineage of Jesus?
5. What kind of Messiah had this led to Jewish communities expecting?
6. What is meant by the term 'messianic secret'?
7. Give a Bible verse where this appears.
8. How does Matthew demonstrate his theological agenda?
9. Give an example of a 'birth narrative' and 'proof text' in Matthew.
10. What does Hooker believe these narratives reveal about Matthew?

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1.2 THE WORLD OF THE FIRST CENTURY THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS CONTEXT THE LIFE AND WORK OF JESUS



STARTER ACTIVITY

1. Set a timer for one minute, with a pen and piece of paper ready. Then time as much as you can about the world of first-century Jerusalem.
2. Discuss with your neighbour or a friend what you wrote down, and see what is in your answers.

Putting the gospels in context is the key to understanding the complicated nuances and differences. By understanding the context in which Jesus lived, readers of the gospels gain a deeper understanding of the significance of his recorded words and actions. Furthermore, understanding the context in which the gospel writers were living and working, an understanding of the reasons for their choices when recording the gospels can be gained.

The world of first-century Judea was an interesting one, both **religiously** and **politically**. As a much-sought-after trade zone, the region had been at the centre of various takeovers, leading to a feeling of discontent among the Jewish natives. Before the time of Jesus, there had been the Maccabean revolts in 167–160 BC. This was reaction to the imposition of different ruling and, resultantly, competing cultures.

The expansion of Alexander the Great's empire in 332 BC meant that the culture of the contemporaries lived was **Hellenistic** – meaning it was heavily influenced by Greek culture. The Roman occupation was another important political factor which heavily impacted the culture of the time in which Jesus lived, and indeed the times in which the gospels were written. The Jewish people under the Roman occupation had a variety of different responses to the occupation, differing religious and social importance.

Religious Groups in Palestine

Palestine at the time of Christ was predominantly Jewish; however, the ways in which Judaism was manifested and practised culturally was diverse within the region. Judaism can be divided mainly into the following groups of importance: Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Zealots, High Priests / Chief Priests (Levites), Scribes and followers of John the Baptist. There was also an organisation known as the Sanhedrin, which functioned as a kind of religious court. The Sanhedrin alone had the power to appoint a High Priest. Religion in this era was central to the practice of daily life and often the lines between religion and politics became very blurred. Unlike today, when the practice of religion for the vast majority of people is removed from public life, the Jewish faith was socially imbedded in the region and saturated the daily experience of anyone who identified as part of this community. Understanding the place, role and beliefs of each of these groups is an important facet to understanding the context of the gospel stories, especially as many of these groups appear exclusively in the New Testament, meaning their existence was specific to the practice of Judaism in this time and region. This was believed to have occurred as a result of Jewish exile in Babylon and the resultant return to the region of Judea, as Jews to distinguish themselves as a group against other Hellenistic faiths present in the region.

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The Pharisees

The Pharisees were a political-religious group which were highly socially respected in the Jewish community. They followed the purity laws of Judaism as outlined in the Books of Leviticus and Numbers. They obeyed the laws at all times; for most Jews, these purity laws only need be observed when performing religious duties. Pharisees lived separate lives from the average Jewish people as potential interactions with Gentiles result in ritual impurity, which they avoided; even the term 'Pharisee' comes from the Greek. Jewish historian Josephus, himself a Pharisee, states that there were roughly 6,000 Pharisees at the time. They are mostly made up of middle-class Jews. They were also in charge of ensuring the adherence of the first century to the religious codes and rules – for example, work on the Sabbath was prohibited, and the Pharisees were concerned with ensuring no Jews undertook work that was construed as work.

The Pharisees feature heavily throughout all of the gospels, mostly in opposition to Jesus. Brown argues that *'Luke presents a series of five controversies (5:17–6: 11) in all of which Jesus is opposed, mostly involve such incidents as 'his claim to be able to forgive sins, his associates eating with sinners, their picking grain and his own healing on the Sabbath'.*⁸

While not as supportive of Roman rule as the Sadducees were, the Pharisees also opposed the Roman occupation; however, they are thought to have had a high influence on the Jewish people. They were looking forward to the prophesied Messiah to liberate the Jewish people from Roman rule. Their belief regarding Pharisaic messianic belief aligns with their origin, as they are a group that began their beginnings in the Maccabean revolts. Therefore, the existence of the Pharisees is a result of the impact of the Roman occupation and rising impact of Hellenisation in the region; it is a new system of Judaism which is only introduced in the New Testament, as there are no references to their presence in the Old Testament.

Sadducees

Sadducees were another conservative Jewish group at the time, often referred to in the gospels alongside the Pharisees. The term 'Sadducees' is thought to potentially stem from the Hebrew word for righteous. Sadducees were generally upper-middle-class Jews, and a vast number of these men were part of the Sanhedrin. Many of the Sadducees did not oppose the Roman rule in the same way that other Jewish groups (such as the Zealots) did. Mostly they are believed to have had a good relationship with the Roman authorities and enjoyed the benefits they received as part of the system. They had considerable social and political power.

They are an interesting example analytically being a new religious group. The Sadducees are only mentioned in the New Testament, with no references to this group in the Old Testament. Scholars believe that the Sadducees were a part of the new system of Jewish religious legislating of the religious social group which was established in what is known as modern Palestine from historical exile in Babylon. Their presence in the Sanhedrin, is indicative of a society in which the ruling power has been taken over by the Romans, and, therefore, this is as a result of a need to return to the previous state of being Jewish. The Sadducees did, however, cooperate with the Roman system in a way which was not common for other Jewish groups, which has been indicated. This could perhaps be rooted in the fact that the Sadducees were, therefore, economically comfortable under the Roman rule, resulting in them having no reason to oppose their occupiers. Comfortable in such a system, it would then logically follow that the Sadducees are represented within the gospels as being opposed to Jesus' ministry would have been a declaration threatened the authority of Jewish rulers, a power which for a first-century Jew, as the land was occupied by a foreign force would be a power to which one would hold on.

⁸ Brown, Raymond E, *Christ in the Gospels of the Ordinary Sundays: Essays on the Gospel Readings* (1981), p. 100.

Essenes

The Essenes were a very small Jewish sect about which little is known which were active during the Second Temple Era). Flavius Josephus, a Pharisaic Jewish historian, indicated quite a few Essenes, but that they were outnumbered by the Pharisees and Sadducees. He associated this group with the writing of the Dead Sea Scrolls, although this view is debated. They seem to have been focused on holiness and purity, with many choosing not to marry, to be chaste and avoid the passions of the flesh. They are also described as keeping an observance of the Sabbath. Analytically, this is a group which were desiring to live strictly by the law of holiness and separately living. This is demonstrative of the movement within Judaism at the time, a direct result of their occupation by a series of successive occupying forces. The focus on holiness within this community is representative of a cultural shift among many Jews who reacted to the extended periods of occupation with a practice of Judaism which was more focused on a culture which is definitively 'Jewish'.

Zealots

Termed 'Zealots' by Flavius Josephus, this was a smaller group of Jews whose focus was on political matters – namely, reactionary resistance against the Roman occupation. One of Jesus' 12 disciples was part of this group, known as Simon the Zealot. They were a group of Jewish political activists who proclaimed their allegiance to God alone, meaning that they refused to submit to the Roman rule in the region.

There are recorded instances of them using violence against the Roman regime and Greek influencers as a method of resistance. They are believed to have been formed in direct reaction to the census and resultant changing in taxation practices described in the Bible, which was ordered by Quirrinus in AD 6. The group is commonly believed to have been instigated by a man named Judas of Galilee, and they are believed to have played a role in the Jewish uprising that culminated in the destruction of the Second Temple in AD 70.

As a political religious group, this is one of the clearest examples of how the Roman occupation impacted the Jewish groups of the time. It was a politically motivated movement to defend the political and religious identity of Judaism, which it wished to defend against the other cultural influences. This is an example of the sentiment among some Jewish groups of the time towards the occupation.

High Priests / Chief Priests

The High Priests and the Chief Priests were important figures within the running of the temple. They were the highest authority within the temple. They were the only people able to enter the Holy of Holies, which is the area of the temple in which Jews believe God dwells. They were in charge of the rituals, a result, meaning they had a high level of ritual importance within the practice of Judaism. For example, they are central to the practising of the Jewish Yom Kippur sacrifice, a method of absolving sins. They were in charge of the running of the temple and all its affairs. The High Priest also had the responsibility for presiding over the Sanhedrin.

The Chief Priests were the second in command of the temple; they had important roles in the running of the temple. They should have been of the Levite tribe, which were a lineage of priests which were appointed within the Torah to have the familial responsibility of priests.

Both the High Priests and the Chief Priests are presented throughout all gospel accounts as opponents of Jesus, and opposed his ministry. This makes a large amount of sense and is historically accurate, given that Jesus was proclaiming some very controversial things about himself and his relationship with God. Furthermore, despite biblical scholarship believing that the Pharisees did not expect a messiah, contextually it makes a large amount of sense that they would be in opposition to Jesus. Christ. In addition to the messianic secret (i.e. the fact that Jesus is reported as having said he was the Messiah), the messianic expectation of the time was looking for a specific character who would use his power to dramatically liberate the Jews from their situation of occupation.

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unsurprising that the passive carpenter figure of Jesus as presented within the gospels is not shared by the Pharisees given the context of their beliefs regarding the coming Messiah.

While Chief Priests and High Priests have basis within the Old Testament, as they were from the Levite tribe whom God ordained in Numbers 8, their role within the Sanhedrin and their authority is something that is included within the New Testament only, possibly in response to some form of Jewish ruling class in reaction to occupation.

The Scribes

The Scribes were a group of Jews who were socially respected within the Jewish society of the time due to their close work with Scripture. Due to the requirement for Jewish Scripture scrolls to have completely no errors whatsoever, Scribes would have to restart a scroll from the very beginning should they contain any errors. As a result, they were incredibly meticulous and learned, and spent a large amount of time focusing on the Hebrew Scriptures, meaning they knew the Jewish law well. They were highly respected within the Jewish community as a result.

The Scribes held an important position within Jewish society when placed within the context of the history of the Jewish people. When Jerusalem was overtaken in 586 BC and the Jews were exiled to Babylon, the First Temple, which contained the copies of the Jewish Scriptures, was plundered and the majority of Scripture destroyed.

The heavy association between the Scribes and the law is a prevalent theme throughout the gospels as they are characters portrayed along with the Pharisees to be legalistic in their approach to the law. Unlike the Pharisees, the Scribes are posited as in opposition to Christ, as Brown states that they 'do not see the *'chief priests and the scribes seeks to destroy Jesus for this teaching; and his popularity among 'all the people'.*⁹ Brown also points towards Luke's notable incident at the Sanhedrin gathering that Luke's Gospel argues condemns Jesus to death, stating that the *'consisting of rulers, elders, scribes, and chief priests is convened against them (4:1-5)'. Luke also states that 'elders of the people, and chief priests and scribes was convened against Jesus (Luke 22:66-71)'*.

Followers of John the Baptist

These are a group of people recorded within the gospels to have been following John the Baptist as he preached throughout the region and baptised in supposed preparation for the coming of Christ. John the Baptist was revered as a prophet, and is described in the gospels as having preached and baptised people within what Matthew terms the 'wilderness' of Judea and baptised people in the River Jordan. His preaching focused mostly on his revelation from God that the Messiah was coming, and that the people needed to mentally and spiritually prepare themselves for his coming. In the gospels, the baptism of Jesus himself by John is recorded, and John identifies Jesus clearly as the Messiah for whom he was been preparing the people. John is emphatic within the gospels towards the point of ensuring that people did not mistake him for the Messiah, rather that he is the one who has been sent before the Messiah.

John 1 describes the first of Jesus' disciples as being called to follow him from among the followers of John the Baptist. Due to following John the Baptist, who believed Jesus to be the Christ, the



At the end of the first century AD, the next time we see anything while will be

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⁹ Brown, Raymond E, *An Introduction to the New Testament*

¹⁰ Brown, Raymond E, *An Introduction to the New Testament*

Hellenism

Hellenism is the term used to describe the cultural effect following the geographical conquest of Alexander the Great in the fourth century BC. R Brown references the conquest of the region specifically relevant to New Testament studies, as having taken place in 332 BC. The region experienced an influx of Greek culture which became known as Hellenism. Furthermore, the ministry Jesus lived and practised his ministry was also taken over by the Romans in 31 BC.

As a result of this, Greek culture permeated Jewish culture in the region. This resulted in what was termed Hellenistic Judaism in Acts 6:1. Examples of this Hellenistic culture include the Hebrew Scriptures (the Torah) being translated into Greek, which is thought to have taken place in approximately 3 BC. Scholars have observed that this period demonstrated Jewish adoption of Greek literary styles such as poetry and plays, as well as Greek becoming a common tongue within the region.

This resulted in a strong Greco-Roman influence on the culture in which Jesus and the apostles lived and preached, as well as the culture in which the gospels were written. This was known as Hellenism. When studying the New Testament texts as it adds contextual understanding both to the culture in which Jesus lived and preached, and to the society in which the gospels were written. It will help to understand the gospels were written and, therefore, should inform the way in which we interpret them.

It should not be assumed, however, that all Jews within this region became Hellenised. Brown stresses that this is not the case, '*Jews and Hellenistic institutions and culture, with attitudes ranging from enthusiastic participation to ghettolike rejection*'.¹¹ Indeed, this is shown through the differing views of the priestly groups and factions of Judaism – the cooperative attitude of the Sadducees towards Roman occupation (and the resultant influence of this in their Jewish culture) can be viewed as a revolutionary and reactionary attitude of the Zealots.

A striking example of the influence of Hellenism can be seen in the life of Titus Flavius Josephus, a useful and important author within biblical studies. He was a first-century Pharisee. In his *The Antiquities of the Jews*, which is a primary source used by many biblical scholars, he states that within it. Interestingly, Josephus was not born with his notably Roman-sounding name. He was of priestly descent, he was given a notably Hebrew name when he was born: Yosef ben Yosef. He was given a Romanic moniker when he was released from capture by the Roman Vespasian during the Jewish rebellions against the Roman occupation in AD 67. The assumption of a Romanic name (for whom names hold extremely symbolic significance) is a clear and stark statement of the influence of Hellenism on Jewish culture of the time.

It is important to remember also that there were more religions than Judaism within the region. Other gods and religions were present in this region, including Isis (Egypt), Baal (Syria). These different polytheistic faiths stood in religious and social contrast to the monotheistic faith of Judaism. Hellenism also affected the practice of Judaism as a faith. When the Jews returned to the region known as modern Palestine, there was a shift in the practice of Judaism with the emergence of new sects of leadership with socio-religious importance, such as the Sadducees and the Pharisees, not present in the Old Testament. The ways in which they practised these laws and the influence of Greek systems of law, such as courts, rather than traditional Mosaic practices of law.

Furthermore, with the introduction of other religions and other lifestyles into the region during the Roman occupation, there was a need felt to establish an identity as a people that was distinct from the 'Jewish'.

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¹¹ Brown, Raymond E. *An Introduction to the New Testament*

Roman Occupation

The occupation of these territories by foreign powers and groups such as Persians and Assyrians began before the Roman occupation, as previously explained, predating the conquering of the region by Alexander the Great in approximately 332 BC, successfully taking over the Persian Empire.

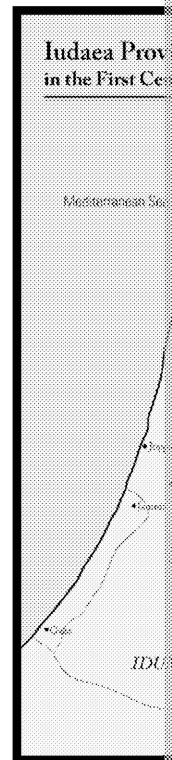
At the death of Alexander the Great, there was no clear successor and, therefore, the regions were divided up among his generals, leading to a succession of different occupying leaders ruling over the Jewish inhabitants of the region. These leaders did not necessarily agree on the division of governance and this led to a great deal of infighting between them. Due to the richness and opportune geographical positioning of Judea, it became a much-sought-after area as it is situated in the middle of a key trade zone.

As a result of all this infighting, by the time that the Romans invaded the region in the expansion of their empire, it was relatively easy for them to gain power.

Herod the Great ruled the provinces relevant to the life and ministry of Christ before his birth, passing this down to Herod Antipas at the time of the birth of Christ. According to the Gospel of Luke, Caesar Augustus was the Roman emperor ruling over the region at the time of Jesus' death, Pontius Pilate was one of the ruling prefects in the Judea province sentencing of Jesus.

One of the effects of the Jewish resentment of Roman rule was that the time of Jesus was characterised by what has since been termed a 'messianic expectation'. Due to Jewish belief that the coming Messiah would be both a political and a religious figure, there was a strong expectation that the Messiah may come to liberate the Jews from the Roman rule under which they lived. This highlights an important facet of the culture in which Jesus lived, which will have been familiar to the writers of the gospels. The timeline overleaf is a representation of the Roman occupation; however, as some dates are approximations rather than exact, they cannot be said to be certain, but they give a good idea of the situation of events within the period.

One example of the clear way in which the understanding of the Roman occupation helps us to read and understand the gospels is through the attitude towards the tax collectors, who were ostracised at the time of Christ due to their role in serving the Roman Empire – the Romans, collecting the high levels of tax which were imposed upon those living in the region. They were viewed poorly within society. Jesus' choice to socialise and eat with tax collectors was seen by the gospels as having caused controversy within this ministry; it was something he was criticised for. Matthew, Mark and Luke as having been directly challenged on by Pharisees.

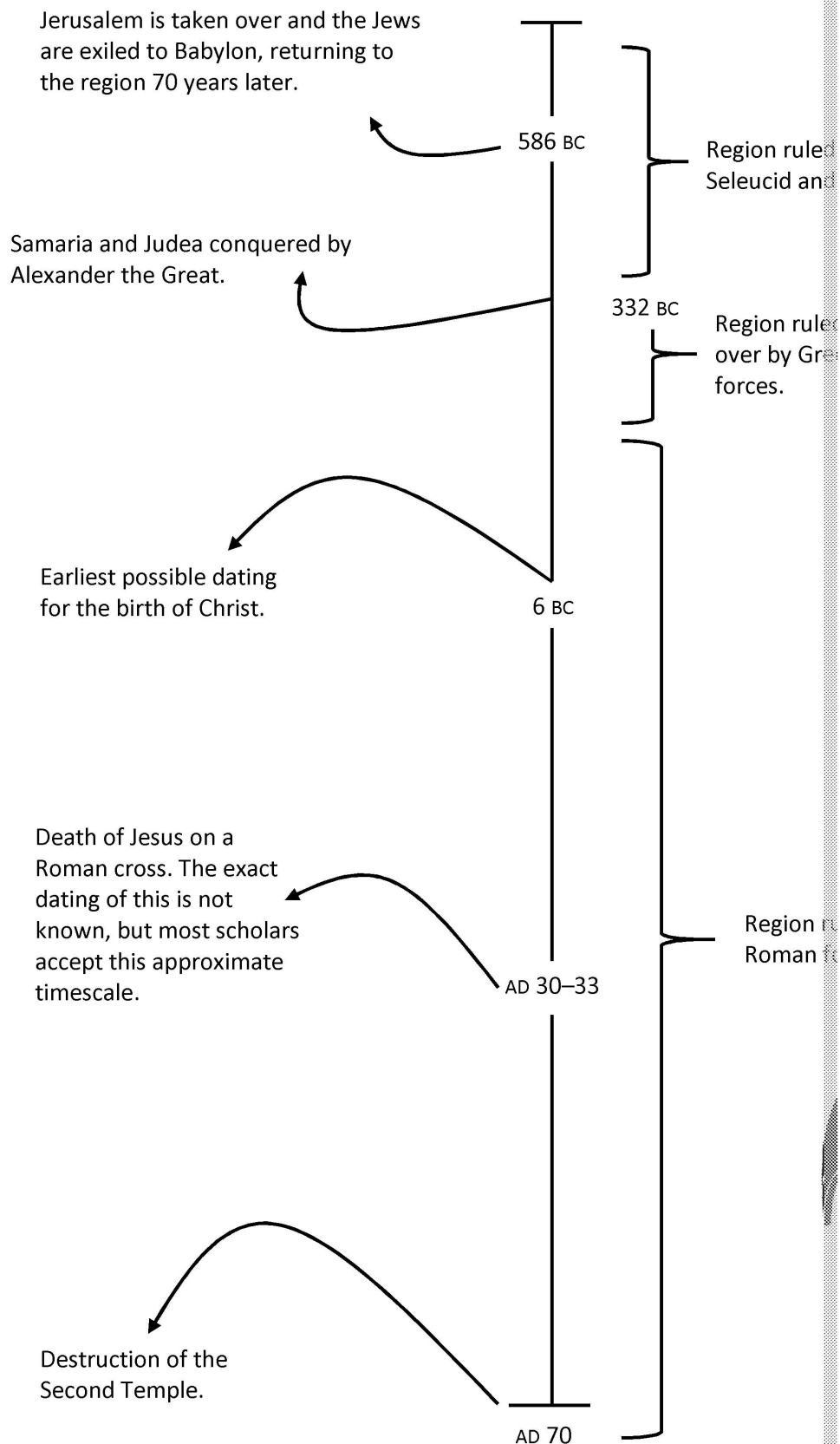


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THE HISTORY OF JEWISH OCCUPATION



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Role and Impact

Therefore, the context into which Jesus was born and lived, and within which he preached, was culturally and politically diverse. There were many different factions within society, some reactionary to the occupation of the area, whether positively or negatively. The regional dialect and the resulting political biases of those living there both affected the way in which it was recorded in different ways by different gospel writers. It was the language in which the gospels were recorded. The primary dialect that Jesus is recorded to have spoken was the regional dialect of Aramaic, whereas the gospels are recorded in a variety of languages, including Hebrew. This may have affected translations or recordings of sayings, which in turn affects those attempting to establish a historically accurate Gospel.

Furthermore, the continuation of Roman occupation following the death of Jesus affected the way the gospels were written. When interpreting the gospels, the political bias of the situation at the time of writing must be taken into account for appropriate understanding.

On a practical note, the impact of the Roman occupation and the infrastructure that was built made the ministry of Jesus easier. The construction of Roman roads meant that travel between regions was made considerably easier, meaning he was able to preach more widely. The construction of Roman roads also made the previously rural areas more focused around cities, as it enabled them to be more interconnected. The nature of life at this time was that the religious and ethical codes of the time intermingled with the law – therefore, it can occasionally make it difficult to distinguish between the two. However, it is important to understand the way in which the role of the Roman occupation and the increase of Hellenism at the time impacted the life of first-century Jews in both of these manners.

Legal, ethical and religious impact

First-century Jews were ruled under a Roman government. The Romans set up the system where they allowed the groups over which they were ruling to continue practising their own religions, as long as they worshipped the Roman gods, which, as previously mentioned, caused tensions between the Jews and the Romans. These were not the only tensions caused by the Roman occupation. The Romans were the occupiers in the region, following the Persians. It was an area that had been occupied for a long period of time, which is felt in the cultural identity of the region and the displacement of the Jews in the years (167 to 160 BC) before Jesus in the Maccabean revolts against the Seleucids. The tension continued to manifest in the time of Jesus, coming to a boiling point multiple times, leading to Jesus' death, as exemplified in the riots and resulting revolt in the sixties (160–150 BC).

Before the time of Jesus, within the Jewish community there were moral issues with the rule of Herod the Great. The rule of Herod the Great was unpopular with many in the region, and he caused moral controversies. One of these such controversies was the murder of his sons, which some scholars believe could be the root of the massacre of innocents as recorded in the Bible. Ethically, this was an issue for many of his subjects, including Jews, who abhorred the nature of their ruler.

There are two important impacts concerning the influence of Hellenism and the Jewish reaction and the nationalistic reaction. First, the impact on how the religion of Judaism was recorded and how it then reacted in response to the occupation.

There was ethical tension between the Roman Empire and the Jewish community. One of the ways in which the Roman Empire operated during the expansion of the empire was to integrate their religious beliefs to the culture in which they were conquering. This was the case with the other religions of the time – indeed, the goddess Isis was adopted into Roman culture as an icon in Rome. However, for obvious reasons this was not the case with the Jewish religion, as it was considered to be One God, and the worship of any other gods is expressly forbidden. This led to the forbidding of the worshipping of idols. This integrating of the Roman

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they were conquering was one of the key facets of Roman rule; therefore, the Roman gods became a source of ethical/religious tension.

Romans taxed everyone who was not a citizen. Jews felt that due to the conditions they could not become citizens. The issue with Roman citizenship was you could not be adopting concepts such as worship of the Roman gods, and this is strictly against what is across the Hebrew Holy Texts. Therefore, Jewish people felt unable to become Roman citizens as a betrayal of their religious and cultural identity. Therefore, the Romans taxed the Jews heavily. Obviously, this was viewed as persecution and was not taken well by the Jews. This is thematically present within the gospels themselves, for example, through the parable of the tax collectors.

As a result of the imposition of a foreign ruling class, among first-century Jews there was a feeling of needing to revert back to a more inherently 'Jewish' state, most likely in reaction to the imposition of a system to govern them that was not Jewish, and also of the close proximity of other faiths which were starkly different to monotheistic Judaism, such as the polytheistic belief in the Greek gods.



In reaction to their occupation, within the Jewish community there had been a resurgence of nationalistic feeling, strongly tied to messianic expectations, that there was a strong dislike of the Roman occupation, and those who were loyal to Jewish traditions and looked forward to a coming Messiah (imminently) who would overthrow the Roman oppressors. This is one of the most important impacts of the Roman occupation. Their national identity as a collective group became even more closely linked to the Jewish faith. Their century Judaism, meaning that ethical and legal practices were important factors. This was a period in which Jewish messianic expectation reached a proverbial boiling point, with a military leader who would liberate the people from Hellenistic culture and Greek influence. This was seen in the Maccabean revolts of 167–165 BC; the displeasure of the Jewish people in the Greco-Roman rule manifested in a need to identify with the traditional Jewish law with which messianic expectation was expressed.

So, then, it was into this social context that Jesus preached his message – one which was awaited by those in the Jewish community awaiting the Messiah. However, messianic expectations are very different to modern ideas of messiahship as influenced by Christian tradition. The Jewish expectation was of a great ruler or military leader who would be able to free the Jewish people from the Roman occupation. There is little surprise that the gospels contain accounts of Jews who opposed Jesus, as Jesus whose parents are well known within the community does not exactly fit the expectations.

On a different note, when examining the gospels it is important to remember the influence not only the life of Christ but that of his followers and the gospel writers. The influence of Hellenism and the role of the Roman Empire, but also includes the role of the Jewish faith. The new structure of authority within Judaism explored previously had an impact on the early Church. The structure of the Jewish socio-religious infrastructure had an impact on the early Church, of which the vast majority of members were Jewish converts, so the early Church has been viewed itself as a Jewish sect. The experience of the early Church is documented within the Bible, and outlines an experience of persecution at the hands of Jewish people. Clearly this tension between these two ethical-religious groups has impacted the development of the early Church. We have considered how this impact would then have caused a potential bias within the accounts of the early Church who are writing within the context of the early Church (as the gospels were written in the first century of the death of Jesus).

There was one distinct ethical problem for Jews being ruled under a polytheistic Roman Empire. The difference in their practice of theology. As discussed, there was notable tension between the Jewish people and the Roman Empire due to the stark religious differences between polytheism and Judaism.

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Roman system, the model that was used for taking over an area involved the occupation of the Roman gods. It would be difficult for a monotheistic Jew to come to terms with the beliefs in multiple gods and to be required to worship the Roman gods also. The Torah – the legislation of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 specifies monotheism for Jews; the first two of these commandments specifically outlaw the worshipping of other gods than the Jewish God Yahweh.

Furthermore, there was an ethical issue with the taxation which was observed with the Temple tax. To Caesar could be seen to have verged on worship, as money was traditionally a sacrifice to God and a method of sustaining the function of the temple as an institution. In the Synoptic Gospels, for example in Matthew 22, where Jesus, upon being asked about the morality of paying tax to the Romans, turns the narrative around to make a moral statement about the lack thereof of money, stating, '*Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's*' (Matthew 22:21).

Quick Quiz

1. What were the distinguishing features of the Pharisees?
2. Who were the Sadducees?
3. What was their relationship to the Roman occupation?
4. Who were the Essenes?
5. Who were the Zealots?
6. What was the difference between the High Priests and the Chief Priests?
7. Give one way Hellenism influenced first-century Jewish culture.
8. What was the political sentiment among Jews in first-century Judea?
9. Give an example of how Roman occupation of Judea influenced the legal system in Judea.
10. Give an example of how Roman occupation of Judea influenced the ethical system in Judea.

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TOPIC 2: TEXTS AND INTERPRETATIONS OF PERSON OF JESUS

The person of Jesus is at the heart of the Christian faith, which is a global faith with any religion globally. The person of Jesus, no matter the viewpoint individuals might hold, indisputably be said to have had a huge impact on the world. The person of Jesus in the gospels has had immeasurable impact on society on a global and individual level. The person of Jesus as presented in the gospels insofar as studying the ways in which this person for this has a very important place in the realm of biblical and New Testament studies.

When interpreting the texts, specifically regarding the presentation of the person of Jesus, remember the context in which these are being written. All of the gospels were written during the early Church being set up. This was a time of turmoil for those who declared themselves Christians. Christianity, or the early form of it, spread through the region through word of mouth and through oral tradition, as was a common practice for the time and geographical location. However, it is important to think about how the context of the gospels and their situation within the timeline of the early Church might influence the representations of Christ. For example, the book of Acts in the New Testament was written by the same writer as the Gospel of Luke. It tells of an early Church figuring out how to interact with the new revelation it has received and the new position in society it holds. The persecution of the early Church at the hands of Jewish and Roman opposition also features heavily within Acts, including the stoning of Stephen in Acts 7.

Coming from a Jewish background, many of the newly converted Christians would have been used to an established backlog of law and Scripture. However, within a context where the information on Jesus was being verbally circulated, it is natural there would be theological biases presenting themselves within the text.

2.1 THE PROLOGUE IN JOHANNES

The importance of prologues and introductions to works of historical texts, or indeed any texts, of any period are of high importance. Writers at the time saw the beginnings of texts as a way to state their intent.

Morna Hooker stated that *'In the introduction ... an author would give some indication of the book. Some genres of literature – history, scientific, medical or technical would have a preface, indicating the author's purpose or method'*.¹²

'It was customary for the Greek dramatist to introduce the theme of his play in a "prologue", which provided members of his audience with the vital information that would enable them to comprehend the plot, and to understand the unseen forces – the desires and plans of the gods – which are at work in the story'.¹³ This is an example of the potential effect of Hellenism on the style of writing of the gospels due to the influence on the writers of the gospels.

¹² Hooker, Morna, *'Beginnings and Endings,'* in *The Written Gospel*, ed. Markus Bockmuehl and Donald Senior (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 184)

¹³ Ibid

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The Meaning and Theological Significance

The Prologue in John is a striking and popular passage of Scripture that is important as a whole.

The nature and person of Jesus is the main message of John's Gospel; he wanted to set out at the outset of his gospel who he believed the person of Jesus to be. Theologically, John's intent was to equate Jesus with God, as a person of not just religious importance – but as the Messiah, that he can be called One with God.

The specific way in which the prologue in John is written is pointed to by Brown as an attempt to make a connection between the Old Testament and Jesus. The semi-prologue section differs dramatically from the genealogies of the Synoptic Gospels, displaying

*In the beginning the **Word** already existed.
The Word was **with God**,
and the Word **was God**.
He existed in the **beginning** with God.
God **created** everything through him,
and nothing was **created** except through him.
The Word gave **life** to everything that was created
and his **life** brought light to everyone.
The **light** shines in the darkness,
and the **darkness** can never extinguish it.*

This opening is incredibly different to the Synoptic Gospels, in which the openings begin with establishing a genealogy of Christ. Therefore, it is important for biblical scholars to identify and analyse the possible reasons for the differences. The prologue in John makes statements about who John believed the person of Jesus to be.

SPOTLIGHT ON SCHOLARS: MORNA HOOKER

This prologue, argues Morna Hooker, is the key to understanding the entire Gospel. It lays out in the first few verses a statement of who Jesus is which he then affirms in the remainder of the Gospel.

Therefore, in order to analyse the prologue in John, one must examine each verse and the person of Jesus – the Word who was with God, the light in the darkness, etc.

Hooker points out that the specific use of a particular Greek phrase to open the Gospel has obvious literary links to the opening of Genesis, stating that the, “In the beginning” consists of only two words, in Hebrew one, and it is the word with which the Bible begins. Here Hooker is drawing attention to the fact that the specific wording used in the prologue reveals theological intent to link the beginning of the account of Jesus to the beginning of the Scriptures. This would have been noticed by the Jewish readership of the time and sent a strong theological message to the readership.

Indeed, throughout the entirety of the Gospel of John, Hooker argues the words are presented in the character of Jesus' words, arguing that, ‘from time to time the theological statements attributed to Jesus which then merge into statements by the evangelist [author of John]’.¹⁵

Hooker also points to John 1:14 which posits the Word as the dwelling place which has traditionally been viewed as the temple, or more specifically the Holy of Holies in the Covenant held within the very heart of the temple. Only the High Priests were

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¹⁴ Hooker, Morna, 'Beginnings: Keys That Open the Gospels', Wipf and Stock (1 Jan. 2010)

¹⁵ Ibid

SPOTLIGHT ON SCHOLARS: MORNA HOOK

particular part of the temple, and only after exhaustive purity rituals. As the God, this was separate and completely holy; something that the average Jew but have never experienced. Therefore, the use of this kind of imagery to have been incredibly evocative to anyone of this time, but more specifically, if we view the Gospel of John as being AD 90–110, this would put the writing as being at the Temple. Therefore, this is an incredibly strong theological point made on the community of writers, within a community of Jews suffering a crisis of identity at the central temple.

Furthermore, in John, Jesus is referred to as 'Bethel', which translates roughly as 'house of God', continuing the theme began in the prologue of John in establishing the role of the church following the fall of the Second Temple. This is a clear theological statement of sorts.

SPOTLIGHT ON SCHOLARS: RAYMOND E. BROWN

Raymond E Brown was an American Catholic priest and important biblical scholar. His commentaries on the Gospel discussed the importance of the theology and of the gospel – and, more specifically, the purpose of the Prologue in John.

He argues that the Prologue in John functions as a Christian hymn most likely from the Johannine community which he argued was most likely used in early Church history at the beginning of John's Gospel following its compilation by the writers. Brown views the Prologue of John functions as an 'overture' to the Gospel.

This is the use of metaphor for Brown to communicate his ideas about the intent of the gospel and how it reflects the intent of the authorship of the gospel itself. As music used as an introduction to an opera (however, this is not always its function when performed as an individual piece). This metaphor in Brown is used to show how the Prologue in John to be viewed as a 'setting up' of sorts for the tale of the new covenant. Importantly, material from the Prologue can be compared to excerpts from other passages outside of the gospels – for example, it can be compared to hymns in Luke 1:15–20, 1 Timothy 3:16 and Hebrews 1 (among others).

However, this is not the only interpretation of the Prologue addressed by Brown. He argues that it was written specifically to introduce the Gospel, and the parallels to other hymns identified by Brown could be the result of the Johannine community's involvement in hymnody. It could be argued that the specific choices of language and the thematic, liturgical links which are strong throughout the Prologue and connect it well to the rest of the Gospel indicate that it was not an external hymn added onto the Gospel's beginning but was intentionally in order to introduce the Gospel. It is possible, or course, that Brown should the Prologue be some form of adaptation from a hymn for the purpose of the Gospel.

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¹⁶ Brown, Raymond, 'Historical Tradition and the Fourth Gospel' Cambridge University Press, 23 September 1979.

The Word Made Flesh

The concept of **'The Word'** as a way of introducing and representing Jesus is **unique** and also incredibly significant in the theological message of the Gospel. John alone refers to it. Within biblical studies, this is known as the **'Logos'**.

The closest translation for the Greek word 'Logos' which is used here is indeed 'Word' – something in translation. The word Logos in the Greek more accurately translates 'reason' or 'argument'. It is the hidden meaning, the reason a person has behind the argument.

Regarding the concept of the Word Made Flesh, John combines the idea of the God who is inherently human, underlining the incarnation of God in human form which he believes. Kruse argues, *'Alongside all this emphasis upon Jesus' exalted status the evangelist also emphasises Jesus' human frailty, thereby confirming the fact that the Logos became flesh: he wept at Samaria (4:6), he wept at the tomb of Lazarus (11:35), and from his pierced side blood flowed (19:34).'*

Furthermore, the role of Jesus as the Logos clearly recalls Genesis 1:1 which states *'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth'*. This strikingly similar structure reveals something of the overall structure of the gospel as a whole – from the very first line of the gospel he is drawing on Old Testament imagery to attract the attention of the Jewish readership who would definitively recognise such a reference. John places the Logos, Jesus, as being present at creation.

Kruse articulates that the term Logos would have provoked understanding and discussion among the listeners and readership of the time 'whether Jew or Gentile'. He argues that there were various different groups within the time in which John was written. The examples are:

- A. The representations within the Jewish Torah (Old Testament) of God as having a continuous role in continuing to renew his creation, the revelations given to the Prophets of the time.
- B. The stoic idea of Logos, which entailed an element of divinity being present in the world to enlighten human understanding of the divine.
- C. Logos is also found within the work of Greek Philosopher Philo, who used the term Logos to refer to the Word of God and the 'agent of creation and the mediator between God and the created world'.
- D. There was also 'rabbinic speculation in which the Logos was identified with the Messiah'.
- E. There are concepts of the Logos also present in Gnostic writings of the time which distinguished between physical and spiritual worlds.¹⁸

Therefore, this demonstrates that the use of the specific word Logos here to convey the concept of the Word Made Flesh is a specific theological point being made by the writer of John. The writer of John has specifically chosen that word to appear universally. It appears to be a word that carries the meanings associated; otherwise, the word 'rhema' (also Greek for 'word') would have been used. The word is used in John and throughout the other gospels to refer to things Jesus said. The use of Logos rather than rhema is a specific theological point being made by the writer of John.

The concept of the **Word Made Flesh**, therefore, becomes hugely significant towards the end of the Gospel for modern Christian communities. It is directly identifying Jesus as the Incarnation – the Word of the God of the Old Testament the Yahweh of the Jews, in human form. It ties together the concept of Jesus with divinity.

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¹⁷ Kruse, Colin C. *'The Gospel According to John: An Introduction and Commentary'*, W.M.B. Eerdmans, 2004, p. 10.

¹⁸ Kruse, Colin C. *'The Gospel According to John: An Introduction and Commentary'*, W.M.B. Eerdmans, 2004, p. 10.

Concepts of Life, light and Dark

Life

The concept of light within the Gospel of John, specifically the Prologue in John, is the Christian concept of salvation. Life and salvation are intertwined.

This idea of sin connecting to death and salvation through Christ being connected to life but is rather an important and emphatic motif throughout the whole of the New Testament Christian belief. For example, Romans 6:23 states that *'For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord'*. This demonstrates that this was an important concept that continued to be an important and influential concept to the Church today. By positing the world, the gospel is positing Jesus as offering life. The resurrection of Jesus and Jesus to mankind. This is an important theme which is continued throughout the Gospel. The introduction of Jesus as being the life here is intended to set up the gospel's intention in developing this theological point.

For example, later in the Gospel, it states that, *'Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live, even though they die"'*. Here there is also a clear tie to the Prologue which will also be discussed in this section – the idea of belief. By introducing the beginning of the Gospel, the writers of John are setting up their intent to make theological statements about the nature of the life-giving belief in Jesus. Belief in Jesus leads to new life, and eternal life.

The idea of life within John is directly connected to and directly followed by the idea of light. 1:4–5 states, *'In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind'*. As will be discussed, Jesus in the Gospel of John is tied to the account of creation by the use of language. This places him at the point of creation of life, and this new life he offers is presented as light.

Light and dark

Representation of light within the Bible as a text began in the very start with God creating light *'light'*. There is a theme of light illuminating darkness, and indeed God in Genesis 1:5 said that dark was 'good'. This is a theme that was continued throughout the Old Testament and by the writers of the gospels.

As with the rest of the Prologue, and, indeed, the entirety of John's Gospel, verses 1:9–10 *'life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone. The light that shines in the darkness can never extinguish it')'* have clear roots in Jewish Scripture.

Both scripture and tradition include the idea that God's word gives life to humans. Old Testament Scripture include:

Deuteronomy 8:1 *'Be careful to follow every command I am giving you today so that it goes well with you, and you may increase and may enter and possess the land the Lord promised on oath to your ancestors.'*

Deuteronomy 11:9 *'[obey God's commandments given] so that you may live in the land that the Lord your ancestors to give to them and their descendants, a land flowing with milk and honey.'*

There are also examples of God's Word providing light within the Jewish Scripture.

Psalms 119:105 *'Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path'*

Psalms 119:130 *'The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.'*

These themes are not just evidenced through their relation to Old Testament texts, but are also distinctive themes throughout the whole of this Gospel. The theme of life in Jesus is set up in 1:4, but continued throughout the Gospel in 5:26; 6:33; 10:10; 11:25–26; 14:6.

The theme of the light of Jesus is set up in 1:5, but continued throughout the Gospel in 3:19; 8:12; 12:35, 46. The most notable addition later in the Gospel to this is Jesus' assertion that he is the 'Light of the World'.

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Kruse argues that the role of the world of light situated Jesus as being a person 'with God and who came as light into the world (to make God known)'; the purpose of light within John is to illuminate who God is. Indeed, Hooker supports this line of reference to the light shining in the darkness, we link the theme of creation with the reveal himself [in this case, through Jesus]'.¹⁹

Kruse goes as far as to interpret the setting of certain scenes within the Gospel of John in order to convey their desired themes. For example, 'The Nicodemus story is one of the important Johannine dialogues. This Pharisee, a member of the Sanhedrin, comes to Jesus at night because he does not yet belong to the light'.

There is further evidentiary scripture for the concepts of light and life being inherent in the Apocrypha, including Baruch 4:1 (GNT) which states, 'Wisdom is the book of God's life. It will last forever. All who hold onto her will live, but those who abandon her will die'.

It is very important to juxtapose light with dark. This links to Old Testament text on the gospel writers, as we have established in previous passages. This text refers to Scriptures, specifically containing prophecy about the coming Messiah. Dark here represents ignorance, a lack of understanding or knowledge about God's plans and purposes. Jesus is the illuminator whose teaching and life reveal God's purposes. The writers are making a stark statement about who Jesus is, and this is what they are attempting to convey.

It is also important to consider the theme of light and darkness in how this textually links to passages, such as the parallels with the account of creation in Genesis. Genesis 1:3-5 states, 'there be light,' and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated light from darkness. This passage from the beginning of the Jewish Torah would have been recognisable to the readership of the Gospel of John and, therefore, the parallels drawn here by the writers of the Gospel. It demonstrates the intent of the gospel writers to establish Trinitarianism. Jesus was present at creation and was one with the Father. It is making a statement about Jesus as a holy man, prophet or teacher, but as the Incarnation of God. This is theology which is central to the Gospel, and this we can observe as being the setting-up point for this important theme which is established. This is not just an account of a holy man – it is an account of the Son of God.

It places Jesus as having a central role in the narrative of the salvation of the world. This is not just done through the motif of light, but it is also underlined by John's statement at the opening of Genesis, the 'In the Beginning' of John 1:1 paralleling exactly with the opening of Genesis 1:1. This places Jesus as being at the beginning and also wholly part of the beginning. Ignorance is ignorance, which in Genesis was considered to be juxtaposed with the 'good' of light. By tying these two ideas together, the writers of John are tying Jesus' identity and his mission. His message as truth is the light which illuminates their previous ignorance. His message as truth is the light which illuminates their previous ignorance.

Trocmé argued in his 1995 work 'Light and Darkness in the Fourth Gospel' that the fourth gospel might have used symbolism copied from literature works from the time. He argues that the use of light and darkness as a theme in the gospels bears striking similarities. He argues what they both use, 'Light as a symbol of Truth and Righteousness and Darkness as that of Falsehood and Evil',¹⁹ juxtaposing the two in theological symbolism. This places Jesus as being among the godly, the righteous, the good. Use of well-known or contemporary literature of the time is a plausible argument – it would have been helpful in the minds of the gospel writers to use themes and symbols similar to those which their desired readership would already be familiar with in order to better convey their message of the salvation that they believed Jesus offered.

Draw in John 1:1-18

1. Light
2. Darkness
3. Truth

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¹⁹ Trocmé, E (1995), *Light and Darkness in the Fourth Gospel*. Didaskalia (Otterburne, Man.), 6(2), 3-10.

Belief

The Prologue in the Gospel of John is starkly different to the prologues of the Synoptic Gospels. It opens with a genealogy of Jesus (with the assumed intent of linking Jesus to Jesse, whose house it is prophesied in Jewish Scriptures that the Messiah would come). It is a hymn or poem, with language which is symbolic and poetic. It is demonstrating a specific intent involved – the intent to inspire belief in Jesus as the Incarnation of the Word of the Gospel.

The opening line – In the Beginning – as previously stated, is the opening line of the Gospel, of spiritual significance for the readership of the time. It is a provocative use of a record which would catch the attention of those listening. It is tying Jesus to the idea of God, the one who breathed life into man (*'Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed the breath of life, and the man became a living being.'* Genesis 2:7). The use of this line is a call – a call to belief.

This is further underlined by the introduction of the important theme of belief, which is central to the Gospel of John but finds firm roots in the Prologue, much like the concurrently running theme of light and dark.

This demonstrates clearly the intent of the readership of the Gospel of John as opposed to the Synoptic Gospels. We can learn a great deal by examining how the styles of writing the gospels can demonstrate the messages that the writership wished to convey to the readership. As previously stated, appears to be to set up in the Prologue in John, the theological themes which wish to develop throughout the remainder of the Gospel. This can be seen in a number of ways including but not limited to:

- John 3:16** *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*
- John 20:30–31** *But these are written that you may believe that **Jesus** is the Messiah, and by believing you may have life in his name.*
- John 7:38–39** *'Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water shall flow from within them. By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive.'*

The inclusion of the idea of belief in the Prologue is to demonstrate the intent of the Gospel to those who are in the audience of the gospel and those who come to read it in years to come.

Hooker argues this, believing that the Gospel of John is unlike the Synoptic Gospels in that John is more structured in such a way as to inspire belief rather than to compare Jesus (i.e. his genealogy).

Furthermore, as established earlier within the discussion regarding Raymond Brown's view of the Prologue of the Gospel, it is important to consider the way in which this might also be an expression of the beliefs of the early Church and its missional attempt to inspire belief in Jesus.

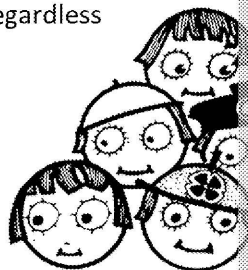
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Children of God

This is an important concept as the ambiguous term 'Children of God' is a uniting term, one applied to all within the New Testament regardless of whether the person concerned was Jew or Gentile.

This was a time and a culture decisively defined by their identity as being Jewish – as being the people chosen by God. By referring to the children of God, the Gospel of John is opening up the label of being chosen and special to the Abrahamic God as being for all, not just for the Jewish people. This would lend the gospel to being for the Gentiles rather than specifically Jewish. At the very least opens up the case for the Gospel of John not being specifically written for Jews.



This is incredibly important. The Jewish faith had been an identifying facet of the identity of the Jewish people for generations – indeed, the identity of being Jewish is passed down through the maternal line. The writers of John, living and writing within a Jewish community, probably understood this, and yet John 1:12–13 states that, *'But to all who received him, who believed in him, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or the will of the flesh or of the flesh, but of God.'*

Indeed, Jesus was not biologically believed to be of the line of David according to the Jews, but was 'adopted'. The invocation of this theme displayed through the inclusion of those who became children of God could be indicative of the feelings of the writers of the Gospel of John.

Guardiola-Sáenz attributes this to the social situation in which the Gospel of John was written. The writing community were Jews who had been excluded from the synagogues and the Temple in Jerusalem. Their identity, previously ingrained in the Jewish identity of being God's chosen people, that has spanned Scripture and generations, had been shaken. Therefore, the inclusion of all as children of God through their belief in Jesus could find roots in their social situation. *'Jesus, the border-crosser who has come from above, becomes the model for survival in a world where the Johannine community inhabits',²⁰ and that this manifests in the Gospel of John.*

Flesh and Spirit

John 1:14 states:

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

This is one very important passage of the Prologue in John concerning Christian doctrine. It is a statement about who Jesus was as the incarnation of God – the Logos, the Word. It links the link between Jesus' physical human body and his divinity and gives the stance of the early Church on the status of Jesus as divine, which was a debate among the early Church. There were many different opinions about the interpretation which should be taken regarding the difference between Jesus' human body and his divinity. It was a debate among the early church causing such issues.

Here in the Prologue, the idea of the Logos is not merely an expression, or something that came into existence at a point of creation, but it is engaged with the world in a flesh form as the Son (Jesus) who would lead the spiritual renewal of humankind. From the Spirit came Flesh, and from Flesh came the Son of Man. This is a largely theological and pivotal point of the gospel first established in the Prologue.

Therefore, in John and for the community of writers in John, the Logos is simultaneous with creation. It is not an impersonal, rational, enduring feature of the universe which exists independently of the world with. It is not merely an additional way for God's power to be understood, as had been the case in the circles of the time. It is instead an important and unique character posited to be the point of creation and pivotal in the redemption of humanity.

²⁰ Guardiola-Sáenz, 'Border-Crossing and its Redemptive Power,' 284

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C H Dodd stresses that, above all, the function of the Logos in John finds its importance in the idea of an imminent and transcendent God and facet of the Logos which fits with the idea prominent in the early Church. As he stated:

In the case of the Prologue, I suggest that the true solution of the problem may be found in the fullest seriousness the implications of the proposition, ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο, in the verse that follows. The Logos did not merely descend upon Jesus, enter into Him, or become the σὰρξ or human nature which He bore. The life of Jesus therefore is not a momentary incarnation, and this must be, upon the stage of limited time, the same thing as the eternal, perpetual relations with man and the world. Thus not only verses 11–13, but the whole of the Prologue, 1–18, is at once an account of the relations of the Logos with the world, and an account of the life of Christ, which in every essential particular reproduces those relations. 'The light which shines in the description of the created universe, in which pure reality is set over against the darkness, is also a description of the appearance of Jesus on earth, as this evangelist sees it in detail in the whole of his gospel. 'The darkness did not overcome it'—the world, with its non-divine elements in it, does not relapse into not-being, because light is stronger than darkness and the good than unreality and evil. Similarly, the opposition to Jesus, even with the crucifixion, failed to conquer Him. 'The real light that enlightens every man'—the light which is seen in the universal mission of Christ, to draw all men to Himself, to gather to Him the children of God. For that purpose He was in the world, but unrecognized by the Jews and by the Gentiles to men, who, as λογικοί (unlike irrational creatures, ἄλογα), are its proper home. Jesus came to men, so Jesus came to the Jewish people, His own people, and found no rest. The divine Logos, or Wisdom, to their souls, become sons of God, so Jesus gave them life of eternal life', and they were born again. (283–84)²¹

Spirit, Law, Grace and Truth

The Gospel of John ties these four ideas together in John 1:17 where it states:

The Law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ

Here, the law is clearly meant to refer to the Old Testament Scriptures, known as the laws which the Jewish people lived by, which they believed to have been given through Moses in Exodus. The law was the cornerstone of first-century Jewish society.

This verse juxtaposes the character of Moses, a highly respected patriarchal prophet, with the person of Jesus, a contemptuous and important claim.

The concept of the law in John is of particular interest to biblical scholars. John speaks of the law while also equating Jesus as the embodiment of the law. Jesus is presented as the one whom the law points to and the one who fulfils the law – meaning he fulfils the law of the Old Testament (as established repeatedly by presenting Jesus as the Suffering Servant and the Messiah). However, he is also described as bringing a new form or a new kind of law, which simultaneously fulfilling, the old law.

Some scholars have argued that the Prologue in John has roots in a pre-Christian Jewish hymn by rabbis of the time and that these roots symbolically equate the person of Jesus with the Torah. The hymn was written praising and loving the Torah in a style and manner incredibly similar to the content of the poetic prologue in John. Should the Johannine community have heard of its existence or content through the transmission of oral tradition, this would make the Prologue in the intentionally mirrored way to this hymn is making a theological point of the law to be worshipped as previous Jewish tradition had worshipped the Moses and to a large extent the same words, within a culture where this poem/hymn would instantly signal to any audience that the writers are equating Jesus with Jewish law.

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²¹ Dodd, CH, 'The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel' Cambridge University Press (1953)

It should be noted that the Gospel of John does not provide a new form of law or considered to replace or challenge the traditional Jewish codes of law as sourced from the Torah (Mitzvot). Interestingly, one way to examine the way in which John deals with the law is by juxtaposing them with the other gospels. Matthew is more preoccupied with the law, while Luke is concerned largely with ethical conduct. John, however, is far more focused on the truth.

Through the idea in John 1:17 of Jesus as the grace and truth juxtaposed with the law, positioning that Jesus offers something better, to amend and fulfil the law; he offers grace and truth.

The narratives of the Torah and the Old Testament show God's continued action in the world and repeatedly intervenes to aid his chosen people, the Jews. This is a narrative that the audience at the time would be familiar with. Therefore, here Jesus is presented as a direct act of grace in the world – a direct act of grace. By referencing Moses and tying the law to his action, God performed by the giving of the law, the writers of John are able to maintain the person of Jesus as being a direct act of grace by God to give truth.

Influences of Judaism and Hellenism

John is very much a gospel written for the Jewish people with a strong Jewish context. There is a reliance and referral throughout the text to Jewish Scriptures.

The inclusion of a Jewish trial in the passion of John is interesting; while the other gospels place the blame for Jesus' death on the conspiring of the Jews, John places it firmly with the Jews.

The ideal audience that would understand the significance of Jesus as the second coming is the Jewish people, so it can be assumed that the writer of John was writing specifically with a Jewish audience in mind. This view is supported by the fact that the messiahship of Jesus was not an issue for Gentiles. Seeing that the gospel was written in Greek, we may say it was intended primarily for unbelieving Greek-speaking Jews.

The influence of the political situation of the aftermath of the falling of the Second Temple and the emotion of the Jewish people is incredibly important when analysing this passage. Most scholars as having been written between AD 90 and AD 110. This situates the gospel in the midst of the aftermath. The destruction of the temple was culturally traumatic for the Jewish people as the temple was considered to be an emblem of inherent Jewish cultural identity. It was the centre of Jewish rituals and festivals and, therefore, was of high religious and social significance. The destruction of the temple by the Romans led to somewhat of an identity crisis for first-century Judaism. The expulsion of the Jews from the temple was culturally traumatic; therefore, it is against the backdrop of this culture that John is writing.

Almost constantly within John's Gospel 'the Jews' are depicted as a group who were rejecting Jesus. Historically, this is unsurprising as the Jews of the time were expecting a messianic figure who would persuade them. Instead, they are faced with a carpenter and a relatively small collection of followers. The presentation of the Jews throughout John's Gospel is negative – the Jews reject both Jesus and the truth.

However, Jesus himself was a Jew, as were his first disciples. On occasion the term 'Jews' is used, but the collective is the 'Judeans', which some scholars have argued would be more accurate. John often refers to the 'Judean Leaders', making reference instead to the Pharisees and Sadducees rather than the Jews.

The Gospel of John and the Prologue itself must be considered in the context in which it was written, a context which includes the presence of Hellenism. This can be seen clearly in the use of the word 'Logos', as stated, only appears in John (rather than the Synoptic Gospels).

Ideas about the Logos can be seen and demonstrated within Greek thought, specifically in the concept of the Logos, which reference comes from Heraclitus in the fifth century BC, showing that this concept was already present in Greek thought.

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²² Kruse, Colin C. 'The Gospel According to John: An Introduction and Commentary', W.M.B. Eerdmans, 2004.

the Gospel of John. It is a concept within the thoughts and discussions of famous philosophers such as Aristotle, and also within the Stoics. In Aristotle it represented reason and discourse. In Stoic understandings it has a far more spiritual meaning, communicating something that is present immanently throughout the entirety of the universe. It is more emotional and spiritual.

The most important figure when examining this link is Philo, a Jewish philosopher who wrote regarding the links between Plato's ideas and the Old Testament writings in the Temple. In this thought, the Logos is the concept of reason existing within God. However, occasionally the term was also used to refer to the way in which God's power was manifested and communicated.

Therefore, it can be clearly argued that the presence of the Logos both in the Gospel of John and the Greek philosophers shows that there is Hellenistic influence on the gospel itself. This would have been immediately recognisable and significant to Greek audiences, as it represented an idea of great power or significance in the world.

In this reading of the Prologue, rather than conflicts as Brown might posit, the Logos is used as a device to reflect the assimilation of different Jewish and Hellenistic cultures."; a device used by the community in order to communicate their theological ideas in such a way which was understandable to people of different peoples.

Therefore, the presence of the stylistic Hellenistic features within the Prologue as being introduced here where it has roots in Greek culture is demonstrative of the influence of the Gospel of John within the Prologue.

Implication for Religious Laws and Codes for Living

One of the main issues facing the early Church was how it established itself as a new religion. The Jews of first-century Judea were a people defined by their religious rituals and beliefs, and specifically as the people of God in their thoughts. To posit Jesus as being a new faith, and being the new revelation of God to mankind, marked a departure from the traditional Jewish beliefs.

It raised questions about how the early Church should behave – questions that were addressed in the writing of the Gospel of John. Questions including whether or not Christians as a new faith should follow the old laws, such as kosher laws, were raised. The call to new belief and truth with the old system of laws clearly could be viewed as a call to depart from the old. This did happen in the early Church as these themes which we can see in John are present in the New Testament and current Christian practice. As a result, many Christians did not and do not follow part of Jewish law.

This is markedly a departure from traditional methods of practice within the Jewish faith, which is argued to be a result of the call to new life and new faith within the gospels, including the themes we have discussed in this section could support such a view – including (but not limited to) the expanding of scope of who could be considered to be the children of God.

This has links to other church writings such as the letters of Saint Paul, where he discusses the idea of being born of traditional natural ways, but instead of God. This is hugely significant as it challenges Jewish religious laws and codes which mandate that a child of God (one of God's children) is only considered to be Jewish if their mother is a Jew. However, in this new method of being a child of God, born through the spirit and the water – reflected in the practice of baptism in the modern Church.

DISCUSSION

To what extent does the Prologue of John's Gospel reflect the influence of Hellenism and Greek thought?

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Quick Quiz

1. What Hellenistic features does John's Prologue display?
2. What is the meaning of 'Logos'?
3. What is the significance of this specific word?
4. What significance would the use of this word have to the Jewish leaders?
5. Give a Bible verse which demonstrates the sentiment that Jesus is light.
6. What significance did the phrase 'children of God' have for the Gentile readers?
7. What significance would this have had to the Jewish readership?
8. What do John's writers communicate in John 1:17?
9. What view of the Jewish readership is communicated by the writing in John 1:17?
10. Why do you think this is?

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2.2 TITLES OF JESUS IN THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS AND SELECTED 'I AM' SAYINGS

One thing of importance about the 'I am' sayings in John is the strong link to the Old Testament Scriptures, one of the terms used to refer to God is I AM, as found within Exodus 3:14. God in the burning bush, when giving Moses instruction on how God would use him to lead Israel from bondage in Egypt.

Then Moses said to God, 'Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, "The LORD has sent me to you." Now they may say to me, "What is His name?"' When God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM'; and He said, 'Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, "The LORD has sent me to you."' Exodus 3:13–15

This view is also posited by **Raymond Brown**. He argues that the I AM sayings in John are a direct echo of the statements in the Torah by the Jewish Yahweh, specifically in the use of the name I AM. This states, *'You are my witnesses,' declares the LORD, 'and my servant whom I have chosen, you know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed,*

Brown links this with Jesus' statement found in John 8:28 that *'you will know that I am he'* to the audience that Jesus is divine and pre-existed with the Father. This signifies that Jesus is the same. The I AM sayings, according to Brown, are intentionally used to parallel with the Old Testament to bestow upon Jesus the power and authority of Yahweh. Brown also argues that this too links to the use of the Logos within the Prologue in John, as previously discussed, as this is a further development of this idea set up within the Prologue.

DISCUSSION

Why do you think the I AM sayings are considered to be so important?

Messiah

The declaration of Jesus as the Messiah in John's Gospel is both clear and provocative. In terms Jesus and Messiah may not appear to be shocking when placed together; however, at a time of messianic hope at the time of Jesus' life and the writing of the gospels, the use of the term is incredibly deliberate and notable.

The declaration of Jesus as Messiah was one of the most controversial beliefs of the time. It is argued to be one of the key I Am sayings which resulted in the blasphemy charges against Jesus in the gospels.

The word used in the gospel comes from the Hebrew term 'mashiach' meaning 'anointed'. The use of Jesus as Messiah using this phrasing would have been further provocative to the Jewish people. The Scriptures are filled with the reference of anointing the Prophets of God with oil, such as the anointing of Elisha (1 Kings 19:16), Aaron's anointing as the first priest of the priesthood (Exodus 28:2) and the Prophet Samuel anointing both King Saul and King David (1 Samuel 16:1).

The expectation at the time of the Messiah being imminent was largely a result of the Greco-Roman occupation was felt keenly by many of the Jewish population in Palestine. Revolts not long before the time of Jesus are evidence of this feeling, speaking to the frustration in Palestine about their occupation and heavy taxation. To a large extent the reality was antithetical to Jewish belief about the coming Messiah; a lowly carpenter killed by the Romans, the belief regarding the Messiah as a great military leader who would overthrow the Roman Empire and free the Jewish people from their plight and suffering in a kind of second Exodus. This expectation was embraced by both the Jewish common people in the region and the Pharisees. The region of apocalyptic literature, as well as groups such as the Zealots, who firmly believed in the coming of the Messiah.

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Son of God

This is one of the most important terms for Jesus because it posits the one unique was the Son of God. This at the time would be considered to be placing oneself or would be considered blasphemy. Within the Jewish context of the region, this would

Notably, in Matthew and Mark, Jesus addressed God as Father during prayer. There is no specific word to represent this relationship. Rather than using the formal term expected of referring to someone else's family tree (e.g. Adam was the father of Eve), the Greek word 'Abba'. This is more of a colloquial, familiar term, the closest English equivalent is something like 'Daddy'. It is a statement of intimate relationship between Jesus and God, indicating that the writers of Matthew and Mark were looking to convey something of Jesus.

The idea of the term 'Son of God' is exclusive to the New Testament with one exception found in the Book of Daniel in the Old Testament. Therefore, as a new term introduced, it is of importance to the analysis of these texts. It was a term used around the time of the faiths to refer to prophets or particularly important figures within other religions. The term represented within both the Synoptic Texts and the fourth gospel is unique to the idea of Jesus as having a special relationship with God is underlined further within the Gospel of God occurring in Matthew 3:17, during the religious experience of Jesus' baptism.

There is a recorded instance within this gospel of the heavens opening and God saying *this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*

This happened immediately following Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist. This is stated in the Gospel of Matthew to underline the importance of Jesus.

Luke 1:35 *'The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Lord will be with you. So the holy one to be born will be called[a] the Son of God.'*

Son of Man

The Son of Man is one of the most important titles for Jesus in the gospels and was used specifically. Notably it is a term only ever used by Jesus in order to refer to himself.

The term 'Son of Man' was also incredibly notable, and is a term referring to Jesus in the Gospel of John. This is significant in terms of New Testament studies, as its exclusive use is included as part of the bias of the writers, or this fact was omitted by writers of other gospels for that reason. Apart from two instances when it is used by other people, the phrase are Jesus referring to himself.

He uses the moniker 12 times throughout the Gospel in order to refer to himself in verses: 1:51; 3:13, 14; 5:27; 6:27, 53, 62; 8:28; 9:35; 12:23; 13:31. A further instance is in 12:34, when Jesus' use of the phrase is quoted back to him. It is Jesus who uses the phrase, therefore, it is significant as this communicates how Jesus saw himself.

The significance of this phrase can be examined by asking the question of why – why do writers in the Gospel of John, use this phrase?

Theologically, it can be understood to be symbolic of Jesus' shared and common humanity with flesh in the 'Word made Flesh' statement. It is Jesus as being a human man – who interacted with other human beings. The humanity of Christ could be argued to be highlighted through the phrase 'Son of Man', which, when combined with the concurrent use of the term, underlined the idea of the incarnation. Jesus here is understood to be both fully God and fully human.

Furthermore, the use of this phrase by the gospel writers, or indeed by Jesus himself, is intentional on the part of the user in order to distance Jesus from other people in the world.

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similar skills. Miracle workers were not wholly uncommon in the time of Jesus, and terminology which was uncommon at the time, Jesus (or the community of writers) used distinctly apart from this other group. He is something different – not simply someone exercising distinct divine power.

Moreover, this idea could be linked to the idea of the messianic secret. Jesus may have used this moniker throughout the gospels in order to keep the secret of his messiahship, even keeping his divinity a secret in order that he can continue his ministry avoiding this. At such a point as is correct for him to reveal himself and fulfil the purpose of the cross. One of the reasons for the use of the phrase 'Son of Man'.

However, in stark contrast to the previous theory, it could be considered by some that Jesus was referring to himself again about who he considered himself to be. The term 'Son of Man' is used specifically in Daniel, which includes a description of a vision of a Son of Man who was given power and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshipped him. Jesus was attempting to align himself with, presenting himself once again as a fulfilment of this prophecy.

This description is found in Daniel 7:13:

In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given power and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshipped him. His dominion is everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

Therefore, to a Jewish audience and readership familiar with this passage, the gospel of John aligning him with this prophecy, once again underlining both his importance and his role as the fulfilment of the Jewish prophecies.

Bread of Life

At a synagogue in Capernaum, the Gospel of John records Jesus as having said:

I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger.

By saying this, Christians believe that Jesus is using a metaphor – he is aligning himself with the bread that feeds spiritual needs. This is in much the same way as bread was a daily food staple in modern times; something that was eaten every day and was an important source of energy for many people. Bread also had importance and significance within the Jewish faith, regularly eaten during the festival of Passover as a remembrance of the story of the Exodus. The reference to bread within the Jewish Scriptures, including the giving of a special heavenly bread to the people wandering in the desert.

Due to the high emphasis in Matthew of tying Jesus to Moses, this manna bread metaphor is also used. As the Jewish people were lost in the desert, so, God provided for them. In much the same way, Jesus referring to himself as the bread of life could be seen to be an allusion to the manna. However, it is worth noting that there is no reference in the book of Matthew to the 'bread of life'; this is exclusive to John. Should the theories about John being a later gospel writer be correct, was something the writers of John wished to underline – just as bread gives energy and physical nutrition for humans, so John presents Jesus as a source of spiritual life.

Furthermore, this motif of Jesus as the bread of life is continued later in the gospel of John, and is a practice today through the sacrament of Eucharist, or communion. This is the practice of (in the context of a church service) and ritually eating bread and wine to remember the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. It is instructed by Jesus himself at the Last Supper.



FUN FACT

The town of **Bethlehem** is where Matthew recounts Jesus' birth. The word 'Bethlehem' means 'House of Bread'. What significance do you think this has?

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Light of the World

I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life. John 8:12

This is an obvious continuation of the theme of light and darkness set up in the Prologue of John. As previously explored, the theme of Jesus as light has strong reference ties to Jewish Scripture, as God's word is referenced in the Old Testament as giving light to the world.

Within the narrative of John, this firmly equates Jesus with God as within 1 John, thought to have been authored by the same writer as the Gospel of John, it states 'God is light, and in him is no darkness at all' (1 John 1:5).

Notably, the Gospel of Matthew also includes a similar phrase when Jesus addresses the Sermon on the Mount, saying to them:

'You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.' (Matthew 5:14)

As mentioned briefly in the section on Concepts of Life, Light and Dark, these ideas are linked to an Essenes community located in Qumran at the time in which it is thought this gospel was written. As Brown states, the idea of Jesus as light of the world could potentially have some theological roots in the Essenes. Brown, stating that,

*Theologically, some would find traces of Qumran influence in the dualism of the terms of light and darkness, truth and falsehood; in the struggle between the light and the Power of darkness (Luke 22:53); and in the struggle between the Spirit of Truth and the world (John 16:11)*²³

Good Shepherd

'I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for His sheep.' John 10:11

Again here we have another connection being drawn between Jesus and David. King David is often referred to as the Good Shepherd. Indeed, the Old Testament is full of references to leaders being described as shepherds or having this as their livelihood before being called to lead by God.

About David there was the prophecy given in Ezekiel 34:23–24 which states, 'I will be to them as a shepherd, as I was to David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the LORD have spoken.'

C H Dodd argues that the narrative indicates that 'The "Pharisees" have expelled Jesus, and Christ Himself enlightened. They are scattering the sheep whom Christ came to gather.' This juxtaposing the 'old', traditionally Jewish Pharisaic practice with the new way of thinking. The writer of John is so concerned with conveying.

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²³ Brown, Raymond E, 'An Introduction to the New Testament', Yale University Press (2016)

²⁴ C H Dodd, 'The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel'

Once again the Gospel of John is drawing heavily on Jewish Scriptures. A tradition throughout the Hebrew Scriptures is that of the picture of the people of Israel as in Psalm 80:8–16, Isaiah 5: 1–7, Jeremiah 2:21, Ezekiel 15:1–8, 17:5–10, 19:10–14 and we are seeing strong and repeated use of Jewish Scriptures within this text; the logic being chosen by God, like Israel.

Throughout his biblical scholarship, Dodd continually argues that John posits a narrative rather than a historical account. He argues that while this begins and has roots in the 'I am' sayings which he argues work like the rungs of a ladder which the audience climb to truth or reality.

The true vine saying is one example which Dodd draws on in order to communicate. This choice of symbol clearly communicates and emphasises the unity of a plant, with all of its parts working as they should. Nourishment from the roots feeds the plants and this saying functions in such a way as to communicate how nourishment can be obtained by being the Divine Son of God. This symbol, therefore, argues Dodd, spurs on the audience to learn more – scaling themselves further up the spiritual ladder of understanding.

Quick Quiz

1. Give three examples of the titles of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels.
2. Why is it significant that Jesus called himself the Son of God?
3. What was meant by the term 'Son of Man'?
4. What symbolism is being drawn by the use of the term 'bread of life'?
5. Give a Bible verse which demonstrates the idea of Jesus as light of the world.
6. Give a Bible verse which demonstrates the idea of the good shepherd.
7. Give a Bible verse which communicates the idea of the true vine.
8. What symbolism does this have?
9. What is the position of R Brown on the use of the true vine image?
10. Give an Old Testament reference to the idea of the vine.

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2.3 MIRACLES AND SIGNS

Miracles and signs in the Gospel of John mark Jesus as being someone of power.

There were seven main signs in the Gospel of John according to most biblical scholars (water into wine), the healing of the official's son, the healing at the pool (of the lame man), the raising of the dead, the feeding of the five thousand, walking on water,* the healing of the blind man and the raising of Lazarus.

Furthermore, the Gospel of John, in the introduction, states that Jesus performed seven given detailed accounts within his Gospel. Therefore, the inclusion of these signs is very important, and biblical scholars must analyse these signs in order to gain an idea of what the Johannine community wished to achieve by including these. They have likely to convey a specific theological point which the gospel writers are wishing to convey Jesus.

The signs in John's Gospel are designed by the writer to respond to the revelation of God's glory and belief. They are designed to both show his power and reveal something of the glory of God, even at the crucifixion. The raising of Lazarus to life also takes place within the Synoptic Gospels. In terms of the historical accuracy of whether or not this event actually took place, the signs in John of the intent of these signs – to '*reveal his glory*' (John 2:11).

The intent is made further clear by the recorded reactions of those around Jesus. At Cana, with each sign, more people are described as putting their faith in Jesus. In the Gospel of John, to demonstrate clearly to the readership that they are recording the miracles so to provide a provocation of faith among those reading. Even the word used is distinct rather than miracles, signalling that his intent is that these events will point towards God.

It is also important to tread carefully when evaluating any potential secondary purposes regarding the Johannine community and the wider historical situation of this group. The miracles may be able to be interpreted as conveying certain messages or specific points, but that the writers of this gospel posited the primary function of the inclusion of the signs.

For example, Dodd argues that the miracles presented in John should be understood as demonstrations of dialogue, identity and faith; and that the seven signs should be seen in their theological significance. For Dodd, this should be linked to other themes present within the gospels as a whole) such as the 'I am' sayings, or the presentation of Jesus as the law of the Jewish faith at the time. The example posited here to illustrate the importance of the signs contains Jesus' 'I am the Bread of Life' assertion – following the feeding of the five thousand and the water signs.

These signs, when considered in their situation next to these sayings, can be considered as part of a discourse about the true nature of Christ and give the opportunity for the writers to link between his ministry and these signs, and how the purposes of these two things are related.

It is worth noting that the Jewish historian Josephus has recorded his knowledge of Jesus and did not dispute this as rumour or as an untruth. Josephus was not a Christian, but his theological bias towards stating the factual occurrence of miracles and signs. This suggests that these did legitimately happen. There are, however, others recorded who are reported to have performed miracles and signs, so perhaps this common occurrence of miracles within the period would explain why Josephus showed interest in Jesus is reported to have performed.

*Some biblical scholars omit this and substitute the resurrection as one of the signs.

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Water into Wine

This is the first miracle in John, found in John 2:1–11. It details an instance of a wedding called Cana at which Jesus was in attendance. The hosts of the wedding discovered they had run out of wine. Mary, mother of Jesus, is also in attendance and instructs the disciples to do whatever Jesus instructs them to do. Jesus directs their attention towards large jars of water with water set aside for Jewish ritual washing, and the water had turned into wine.

This miracle, or sign, is symbolically important in a number of ways. The feast of the wedding was a highly important part of Jewish marital customs at the time – it was a demonstration of the wealth of the family. To run out of wine at a wedding was considered to be a high social faux pas. This adds further meaning to the miracle itself; Jesus is using his power to help others rather than to aid himself, as is a recurrent theme throughout the signs.

It also brings in Mary, the mother of Jesus, as an important figure once again, highlighting her involvement in his life.

Kruse argues that the specific reference to the water as having come from the jars used in the rituals within Judaism is also deliberate on the part of the writers. The water represents the rituals of Judaism, whereas the wine is heavily representative of the new covenant established at the Last Supper and the resultant Christian practice of Eucharist (communion). In the Jewish Scriptures, represented joy. Jesus is here depicted as bringing abundance to the world, to know who he is.

Brown points out once again that the link between the Old Testament predictions of the Messiah and Jesus is underlined within this miracle stating that, by turning the water into wine, *the OT promises of abundance of wine in the messianic days (Amos 9: 13–14; Genesis 49: 10–11)*.

The placing of this sign within the context of the time allows for easier analysis of the gospel writers felt the need to include this.

Healing of the Official's Son

This miracle is found in John 4:43–54. It describes an encounter Jesus has with a man from Galilee. We can presume that the official in question was one of Herod Antipas' men. A Greek manuscript refers to a royal official, and Herod Antipas was the king of the Galilee.

The man in question approaches Jesus, having heard of his signs thus far in his ministry and to heal his son. Jesus instructs the man to go to his son as he will be healed. The man finds his son to be healed.

The notable nature of this healing is that the man's required belief was to be with him, highlighted in John 20:29 when Jesus is stated to have said *'Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'* Analytically, this is important to note in this later verse, which is a sentiment found only in John.

Therefore, the writers of John have included both this verse and this miracle together for a reason, in order to drive home a theological point. Scholars have posited that this verse, should the dating of John be accurately pinpointed as somewhere between AD 90 and AD 110, could be seen as being included in order to encourage a group of believers who are far removed from the time of Jesus' life. These are not eyewitnesses telling stories at this point in time, it is written by those who have received the tales from others. Therefore, as a theological encouragement, this



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²⁸ Brown, Raymond E, 'An Introduction to the New Testament', Yale University Press (2016)

miracle, combined with the latter verse, could make the case for believing in Jesus performed for themselves.

Furthermore, this is an impressive feat of healing – one recorded in John as having of Jesus, as he does not go with the official to see his son. It is a long-distance healing as being one whose power is not limited by distance; his power here is far-reaching. The Johannine community wished to communicate with their readers.

Healing at the Pool

This miracle is found in John 5:1–47, at a pool of water which was considered at the time to have special properties. This is believed to be the pool at Bethesda, which translates to mean 'place of mercy'.

There are believed to have been many around the pool who were infirm; however, only one man who has been ailed for 38 years. He has not been able to achieve healing. Jesus tells the man simply to 'take up his mat and walk', at which point he is healed and can walk.

The significance of this miracle and its inclusion in John is specifically rooted in the place. It was one of the miracles which Jesus performed on the Jewish weekly day of rest.

This was one of seven miracles performed by Jesus on the Sabbath according to the Jewish law. In the legal/ethical dynamic of the day, this was of huge significance. Healing on the Sabbath was seen as the work of God which aided others and generated good, was viewed by the Jewish elders as a violation of the Sabbath is, within Jewish law, outlawed. Exodus 20 sets forward the Ten Commandments given to Moses for the people of Israel by God.

A similar theme is found in Matthew in which Jesus is criticised by the Pharisees for healing and eat food on the Sabbath. As picking of food is work, and, therefore, forbidden by the Pharisees for allowing his followers to do such an action. Matthew 12:8 states that Jesus responds firmly with an assertion of his importance, stating 'For the Son of Man is LORD of the Sabbath'. In the proceeding passage (16–18) in John, Jesus is rebuked for healing on the Sabbath by the Pharisees or the Sadducees). This verse states:

So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began to seek to kill him. In defence Jesus said to them, 'My Father is always at his work to this very day, and so am I. Therefore, because of this, the Jews tried all the more to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath but he was claiming to be equal with his own Father, making himself equal with God.'

Jesus here is contradicting the law of God in the view of the Jewish elders. He is claiming to be God, which in the socio-religious context of the time was controversial as he is challenging the authority of Judaism, on their knowledge of the Law of Moses which was seen as the law of God. By breaking this law, Jesus was presenting himself as having the same authority as God. This was a serious offence at the time of Jesus was considered not only a sin but a crime within the context of the time (he was tried within the court of the Sanhedrin).

DISCUSSION

Why do you think the Gospel of John included the miracle of the healing at the pool?

Pick one or two miracles and explain their importance and symbolism.

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Feeding the Five Thousand

This miracle is found in John 6:1–24. It records an instance in which large crowds followed Jesus to listen to him preach. His disciples realised that they did not have enough food, or money to purchase food, for the number of people present to hear Jesus preach (namely, five thousand). A small boy is reported to have a packed lunch made up of two fish and five small loaves of barley bread. Jesus instructs the disciples to distribute the food among the people after blessing the bread and fish. The food is miraculously distributed and feeds everyone, with enough left to fill 12 baskets.

It is worth noting that a modern interpretation of this reading has laid emphasis on the patriarchal nature of the time period when these stories were recorded, only the men have been noted down. Women and children are omitted from the numbers. Therefore, more than five thousand people involved in this particular miracle.

This miracle is likely to have been included in detail by the gospel writers as a testament to trust God to provide in seemingly impossible situations, and he will provide a calm nature in which Jesus conducts himself despite being faced with a large task.

Notably, this miracle displays Jesus' power over matter. He is able to generate more food than previously exist; this is what this particular parable aims to reveal of his power. It is his power to generate, which is the key focus of this miracle. This supernatural ability mirrors the Old Testament where God provided for his people, such as the giving of the manna for the Israelites who wandered in the desert.

Walking on Water

This miracle is found immediately after the feeding of the five thousand in John, in 6:16–22. This miracle involves some disciples going on a boat in a lake in Galilee, encountering an issue in the form of rough, stormy weather. Indeed, this particular body of water, due to the geographical location, is prone to violent storms due to the meeting of cold and warm air fronts. The story describes them as being afraid, and then encountering a figure walking on the waves towards them. This figure is revealed to be Jesus.

Interestingly, in addition to the inclusion in John, this miracle is also found in two of the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 14:22–36; Mark 6:45–56). John records in his gospel the occurrence of a storm (*'the lake became rough because a strong wind was blowing'* 6:18).

In terms of John's strong emphasis on Jesus as being the foretold Messiah, there is a link between this passage and a passage from the Jewish prophetic Scriptures of Isaiah 43:2, in which this miracle or sign has particular importance; it is a physical demonstration of the prophecies of the Old Testament.

Isaiah 43:2 states *'When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you walk through fire, you will not be burned; they will not sweep over you'*. In John's (and indeed Mark's) account, Jesus instructs the disciples to remain calm, which some argue links this passage with the one in Isaiah as they both include Jesus aiding his followers in storms.

This miracle is also significant as it is a miracle which does not benefit others in the same way they clearly do – so why do the writers of John include this miracle?

The miracle clearly reveals to one who believes in the occurrence of the event that Jesus is more than a normal man – a normal man would not have been able to complete this feat. It marks him as divine and also demonstrates Jesus' power over the elements, which ties him theologically with God. In Judaism, God is the creator of the world within Judaism and the only one with power over the elements.

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Healing of the Blind Man

This miracle is found in John 9:1–12. It depicts Jesus and his followers encountering a blind man for the entirety of his life. The disciples enquire of Jesus which of his parents caused the blindness of the man. Jesus replies that it is in fact the result of no person's sin, but in order to play a part in the demonstration of God's glory to mankind through the healing. Jesus takes mud and makes a paste, which he then spreads on the man's eyes. Then he instructs the man to go to the River and wash his eyes. When he does so, he can see.

Kruse argues that *'The man born blind plays the part, not only of a Jew healed by Jesus, but also reflects the experience of Jews of a later time who were expelled from the synagogue because of their allegiance to Jesus as Messiah'* ²⁹

This is symbolically important when considering the scripture which immediately followed John 9:1–12. John 9:13–39 recounts how the blind man and his parents were brought by the Jews before the Pharisees and resultantly, due to his attestation that Jesus had healed him, it is recounted how the blind man is banished from the temple. Within the context of first-century Jerusalem, this makes the blind man a social pariah; he has been cut off from his religious community. Quite clearly the painful and traumatic social expulsion of early Christians from the people whose entire lives and families revolve around a faith and a Jewish community. If, in belief in Jesus, their experience of being ostracised from this close culture will have been significant. Kruse argues that this narrative within the Gospel of John could be less historically accurate, exaggerated due to the need to comfort the first-century early Christian converts.

Furthermore, it is worth noting the symbolism of this miracle as linking back to the theme of Jesus as the light in the darkness. Through the ignition of light in darkness, people are able to see. In the same way, through Jesus' presence in the world, John posits that people are able to see. The healing of the blind man is symbolic for a world having its sight renewed. In much the same way, the healing of the blind man bears theological significance. The healing of the man in stages (the making of the paste, the spreading of the paste on the eyes and the necessity of the washing in the river/sea) makes a theological point. It could, and indeed did within other gospels, heal by simply laying hands on a person. This particular structure of healing is significant.

The Prologue of John is not the only textual allusion made by the account of the healing. It is a connection between the person of Jesus and the Suffering Servant of Isaiah. In Isaiah, the Suffering Servant is described as having the responsibility of opening the eyes of the blind insofar as the people of Israel. Jesus is then, within the knowledge of Isaiah, presented as unveiling the truth. The healing of the blind man, but also within Christian thought unveiling the truth, restoring the sight of the blind man, but also within Christian thought unveiling the truth, the 'correct' spiritual understanding of the law (that being, that he is the fulfilment of the law).

Raising of Lazarus

This miracle is found in John 11:1–44. It is a particularly dramatic miracle in which Jesus visits the home of two of his friends, Martha and Mary, in Bethany, who are grieving the death of their brother Lazarus. Jesus questions their grief, and commands Lazarus to walk out of his grave. Lazarus is restored to life, and walks out of his grave.

This particular miracle is directly related to the death of Jesus. Kruse points to the timing of this miracle as being intentional on the part of the writers; by resurrecting Lazarus, Jesus is immediately in danger for his own life as it was at this point when the Sanhedrin decided that he should be put to death, as is recorded in the following verses:

²⁹ Kruse, Colin C, *'The Gospel According to John: An Introduction and Commentary'*, W.M.B. Eerdmans, 2004, p. 100.

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John 11:45–53 (NIV)

Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus had done, some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. Then the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin.

‘What are we accomplishing?’ they asked. ‘Here is this man performing many signs, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away our nation.’

Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, and did not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.

He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them all together and make them one. So from that day on they plotted to take his life.

There is theological significance too to the allowance of Lazarus to die. Previously Jesus healed people close to death; therefore, we know that in this account he has the power to raise the dead. Does the Johannine Jesus allow Lazarus to die and Mary and Martha to experience grief?

The explanation for this could lie in a theory of theological purpose – that this is a sign of restoring life. He shows his power over death, provoking a response from the Sanhedrin.

Raymond Brown, in his discussion on the Gospel of John, was the first scholar to call it a ‘Book of Signs’ and as a ‘Book of Glory’. He argued that the idea of John as a ‘Book of Signs’ is a revelation of Jesus as the Logos to both himself and the world. The signs are intended to be seen one piece at a time, more of the identity of Jesus in the gospel – the Son of God, and the audience listening to Jesus in the gospel, but also to those reading the Gospel. The signs call to belief, to faith in Jesus. While the crowds in the gospel may fail to respond, those reading or hearing John.

In order to make this argument, examples of how the signs function in this way may be found. The sign of the raising of Lazarus as found within John 11:1–44 is one of the best examples because it is a sign which only features in the Gospel of John. Brown underlines how the sign itself and Jesus’ statements following the resurrection of Lazarus demonstrate the intent of the sign – to show the sign as a symbol of how Jesus is the bringer of eternal life. Therefore, on this basis it can be argued that the signs of Christ give to the readership eschatological hints about the Kingdom of God, which they believe Jesus will bring even when those writing or featuring within the gospel accounts have not seen it.

EX

Draw up ways in which the sign of the raising of Lazarus may be seen by...

1. Healing of the blind
2. Walking on water
3. Raising of the dead

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Quick Quiz

1. What purpose do the signs in John have?
2. What connection does Brown make regarding the water into wine miracle?
3. Give the Bible verse containing the healing of the official's son.
4. What is the significance of John 20:29?
5. Why is the healing at Bethesda significant for the Sabbath day?
6. Where is the feeding of the five thousand found in John?
7. What does this miracle show about Jesus?
8. Which passage in Isaiah links to the sign of Jesus Walking on Water?
9. Why is the healing of the blind man significant?
10. What is the theological significance of Lazarus' death?

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TOPIC 3: INTERPRETING THE GOSPELS AND ISSUES OF RELIABILITY PURPOSE AND AUTHORITY



STARTER ACTIVITY

1. Discuss what issues you think would come into play when looking at the gospels.
2. Which factor do you believe is the most important when considering the reliability of the gospels?

Interpreting the gospels from a historical point of view poses many problems for scholars. The gospels are most likely the best sources; however, even these were written decades after the events they describe. The originals were written in different languages to that which Jesus spoke and taught. The gospels were written by eyewitnesses to Jesus' life and ministry, thus the texts are open to misinterpretation, source issues and theological bias.

The reality is that scholars are still unsure as to when the gospels were exactly written. They are not even sure where the information for the gospels stems from, leading to the answer to what is known as the synoptic problem of Matthew, Mark and Luke. The gospels have become more popular than others, and certainly different theories have become popular throughout years of biblical scholarship.

3.1 INTERPRETING THE GOSPELS

As none of the gospels is believed to have been written by those who had a first-hand account of the events, the sources that were used to garner knowledge about how the events unfolded are uncertain. This leads to questions of historicity and reliability of the gospels. By comparing differences and similarities between the gospels, scholars have come up with a number of theories as to how they were constructed. The gospels would reveal about the bias and intent of the writers should they be factual.

Another important term when looking at these concepts is the term **exegesis**. Having the meaning 'to draw out', exegesis refers to the detailed analysis and resultant interpretation of usually Scripture. An exegesis of a passage of the New Testament will include reference to the context in which it was written, as well as consideration of the symbolism within the text with regard to the gospel was intended. This will enable a biblical scholar to get a full understanding of the text which will inform their further study.

Synoptic Problem

The synoptic problem is a term used widely throughout New Testament studies. It refers to the **interrelated nature of the first three gospels** (Matthew, Mark and Luke). The same events, for example, appear in all three; however, each author has taken a different theological perspective. The relationship between these three gospels is clear, whereas the fourth gospel, John, is more distinct and diverges from the facets of the other gospels. Some scholars believe that this is more likely to reveal which events actually happened – for example, should one gospel consistently mention an event, then this might indicate that it was a historical event which actually happened. The issues that arise based on the similarities of the gospels, hence the term 'synoptic problem', have led scholars to solve the issue. Large amounts of the structure of these texts are the same parables and many of the same miracles, and the problem lies in the question of which is the case. This becomes a form of source criticism; trying to ascertain where the gospels came from, and whether or not the reason for their similarities can be attributed to common sources.

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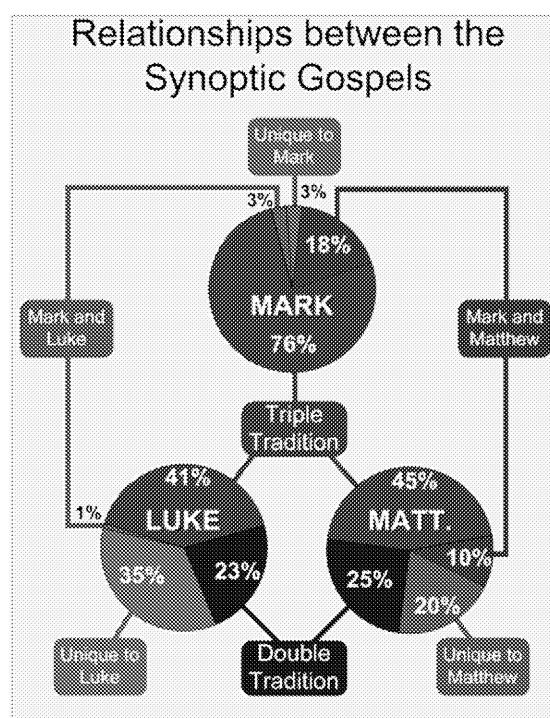
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R Brown is one of these scholars, who points to the astounding statistics of the intertextual relationships between the Synoptic Gospels as an argument for **Marcan priority**. This will be explored in later depth in the next section. He states that approximately 80% of Marcan content is 'reproduced in Matthew and Luke'. This high level of similarity is viewed by Brown to be a compelling argument for the reliability of the Marcan priority theory. If Marcan priority is true, then it is incredibly helpful to scholars as it displays through the writings of Matthew and Luke what their theological bias and intentions were in their composition.

Mark is believed to have been written earlier; the language in which it is written is simpler and more direct than that in Matthew and Luke. This would suggest that the Marcan text is earlier and that the other two texts worked as a source which was then elaborated upon by the writers of Luke and Matthew.

It is observed that the differences between Matthew/Luke and Mark can be pointed to the different historical/political contexts, while the core structure and events are mostly the same. This is within the realm of reasonable plausibility for the Marcan priority theory to be true. For example, Matthew has taken the opening genealogy from Mark and changed it to fit their own ends, presenting Jesus as the new Moses, which is a regular feature in his gospel.



Source, Form and Redaction Criticism

Source, form and redaction criticism are all important aspects of biblical studies used to gain a deeper understanding of the gospels and to garner more knowledge and clarity about different aspects of the gospels and their composition.

Source criticism is the study of the sources which were used to inform the forming of the Canonical Gospels. By looking at texts from the time which are alternative to the canonical texts, scholars can potentially have been used as sources for the sayings or stories contained within the gospels. This helps to garner knowledge about theories regarding why the gospels were written. For example, the **form of source criticism** because it is dealing with the search for the source of the gospels and their interrelated nature. It is thought that source criticism has basis in the actual gospel texts. An example states:

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the truth about the things you have been taught.

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Therefore, it can be established that there were other texts and sources referring to the time of the writing of the Gospel of Luke and that the gospel writer himself was accumulating his own gospel.

Form criticism is the practice of analysing the texts by organising them by type or form. It would be classified under the form of verse (despite them being in the Old Testament). Different forms would include parables. This form of criticism is heavily informed by the German for the **concept of the setting of the texts** within the context of life in which the events took place. Form criticism tends to stress the origin of biblical texts and the style in which they were then written down in a specific style. Therefore, it gives rise to questions such as: which style is used and how this style has impacted the way in which the information has changed when written down?).

Redaction criticism is the study of how the texts of the Bible were **arranged, edited** by those who compiled the now-accepted order and canon. By comparing different versions of similar texts, such as the Synoptic Gospels, there can be a great deal revealed about those writing and/or redacting these texts. Those practicing redaction criticism can see how around the writers and editors have informed the texts. Redaction criticism has two groups: higher and lower redaction criticism. Higher redaction criticism is viewed as the quest for what extent the examined text is genuine. The lower quest is viewed as the quest for the wording used to write the text.

Two-source Theory

The two-source theory for the Synoptic Gospels is as follows: many scholars believe that the Synoptic Gospels were caused by the consultation of two sources during the writing of Matthew and Luke. The core events of the texts are incredibly similar, as is the chronological timeline of Jesus' life and ministry within the narrative.

These sources are widely believed to be the Gospel of Mark itself (this is known as the 'M' source) and a hypothetical source, termed 'Q'. This is the most commonly accepted explanation for the similarity of the Synoptic Gospels; however, it is by no means confirmed and accepted universally to be true as there is no evidence for Q. The hypothesis about Q is that it is a now-lost *logia* text which is composed of sayings of Jesus without the narrative structure of the Synoptic and Fourth Gospels. It is a source that Matthew and Luke are attributed which find no basis in Mark, but are found in both gospels. Many scholars believe that these must have come from the same source. The term 'Q' is shorthand for 'Quelle', which is used, and refers to the German 'quelle', which translates to mean 'source'.

B H Streeter is responsible for the most widely accepted form of Q theory. He proposed that the source Q was written in Greek, which is an Alexandrian dialect in common use from 300 BC to AD 300. It is a dialect which is characteristic of the time period in which Jesus lived and the gospels were written.

A less popular but still scholarly debated theory regarding Q is that it could be composed of multiple sources rather than a single source, which fits with Luke's account of having done his due research before beginning the task of writing the gospel. Scholars have argued against Q. Farrer, in his book *On Dispensing with Q*, makes the case for the similar use of multiple sources. He believes that the reason for the similarity is not a common priority, or intertextual access by the gospel writers.

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As previously stated, the Marcan priority theory posits that the Gospel of Mark was written first, and was known to the writers of Luke and Matthew so much so that it was used as a source for the writing of their own gospels.

The Marcan priority theory is supported by a variety of elements of the text. The rough dating of these texts also supports the theory of Marcan priority. Mark is thought to have been written around AD 60–65 whereas Matthew and Luke are dated more around the 70s and 80s of the first century. It would make logical sense that if these approximate dates are correct, then perhaps the writers of Matthew and Luke had access to a copy of Mark from which they garnered material or structure. Regarding the content which is hypothesised to have been taken from Q, examples are shown below:

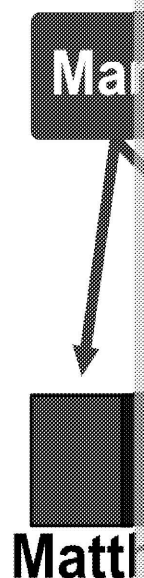
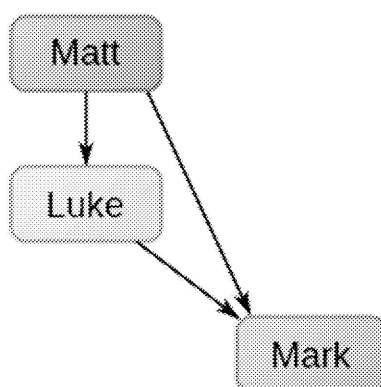


Figure 1: A Diagram

Event	Where it is found Matthew
The tempting of Jesus by Satan three times	4:2a–b
The Golden Rule	5:46–48
The Lord's Prayer	6:9–13
The use of a mustard seed as an analogy of faith	17:20
The parable of the talents	25:1–4
The idea that a man cannot serve both God and money	6:24

Both books also notably contain a genealogy of Jesus tracing him back to Abraham and David, from whose line the Messiah of the Jews was supposedly destined to be descended.

There is another two-source theory, which is less popular than Marcan priority, known as the **hypothesis**. This flips the idea of Marcan priority on its head somewhat, arguing that Matthew was written first, followed by Luke, and then these two texts were used by Mark. The hypothesis is that the commonality was created by the writer of Mark choosing events in Matthew and Luke and choosing to include these. It is represented as follows:



Of the different two-source theories, Marcan priority is deemed to be the most popular and widely accepted, solution to the synoptic problem. This remains the current 'favourite' solution; however, it should be noted that it is not accepted by all scholars and there are those who challenge the two-source theory with reliance on Marcan priority. It is by no means

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Proto-Gospels

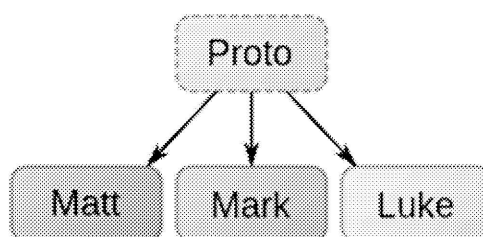
The Proto-Gospels theory discusses the potential of hypothetical early gospels from which the Canonical Gospels were used to compile the Canonical Gospels. Other terms for this hypothesis include the Hebrew Gospel Hypothesis. This theory hypothesises that this Proto-Gospel informed the Gospel of John, which is generally thought of by most scholars to be dated around AD 90. This means that the theoretical Proto-Gospels would inform the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke.

There is also a theory that there was an earlier Hebrew or Aramaic Gospel composed which was a source for the Canonical Gospels – or was translated into the Gospels. Papias (a second-century Bishop in Pamukkale Hierapolis). He posited that there was a Hebrew/Aramaic Gospel which was later translated into the Canonical Gospel of Matthew. Scholars today still debate over whether or not this theory would indicate that the writers of Matthew wrote two gospels and one was lost, or whether or not it was indeed a case of translation.

DISCUSSION

Which solution do you think is most helpful in solving the problem of the Gospels?

There are other gospels which are not hypothetical but are not canonised, such as the Gospel of Peter. These gospels have a tendency to include more mysticism than the Canonical Gospels. They also include an instance of the physical cross on which Jesus was crucified speaking. The Gospel of Peter is a collection of 114 sayings of Jesus giving no narrative context. It is more commonly dated to the late second century, postdate the synoptic texts. The Gospel of Thomas references the Bar Kokhba revolt, which dates the text after AD 140; therefore, considering this was written much later than the Canonical Gospels, it is unlikely that the Gospel of Thomas could be considered a source.



Four-source Hypothesis

This is a less popular hypothesis that refers to the idea that there are four sources for the Canonical Gospels: Mark, Q and two other sources specific to Matthew (known as M) and Luke (known as L). These sources are purely hypothetical, and should they exist they are believed to be independent. It posits that the two different sources (M and L) were not sources which the opposite Gospel used. Luke did not have access to source M and Matthew did not have access to source L.

This theory is supposed to account for material which is found individually in only one Gospel. It was first put forward in the 1920s by biblical scholar Burnett Hillman Streeter. He assigned the following locations to the sources, based on the tone and allusions found within them:

- Q → Antioch
- M → Jerusalem
- L → Caesarea

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As with all other texts within biblical studies, including ones we have access to, the written, or posited to be written, will have a large impact on how they are written about where these texts are from comes directly from the perceived bias that the



ACTIVITY

*In a group or in pairs, read **Matthew 6:24**.*

*In your groups, attempt an **exegesis** on a mind map of the passage. Think about the various elements which have been discussed in relation to source, form and redaction criticism.*

TAKE I

In the 1920s, as P52 was discovered, a fragment of some research discover about find.

Quick Quiz

1. What is meant by the term 'synoptic problem'?
2. What is meant by the term 'Marcan priority'?
3. How does source criticism approach biblical scholarship?
4. How does form criticism approach biblical scholarship?
5. How does redaction criticism approach biblical scholarship?
6. What is the two-source hypothesis?
7. In what way is the Griesbach hypothesis different to Marcan priority?
8. Give an example of a 'Proto-Gospel'.
9. What is the four-source hypothesis?
10. Give an example of one of these four sources.

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3.2 THE PURPOSE OF AUTHORS FOURTH GOSPEL



STARTER ACTIVITY

1. Using your knowledge of John, write a list of the motivations you think for writing the Gospel.
2. Justify your answers with a brief sentence explaining why you think this.

The Synoptic Gospels are generally thought by the majority of modern biblical scholars to be an account of Jesus' life when compared to the Gospel of John. The gospels follow a similar account of many of the same stories and events. John, however, differs entirely structurally from the synoptic texts. There is, of course, debate about this, and there are scholars who believe John is more historically accurate than the synoptic texts and would not necessarily place such emphasis on the interconnected nature of the Synoptic Gospels as evidence of their historic accuracy. Clearly John as distinctly different to the Synoptic Gospels, the question is raised as to whether the writer(s) of John seek to approach the recording of the life of Jesus in such a way.

John is generally dated later than Matthew, Mark and Luke. The dating of the gospel by modern biblical scholars is at approximately AD 90 to AD 110.

The traditional view of the authorship of John was that it was written by John, son of Zebedee, so to speak, as the beloved disciple (although, notably this term only occurs within John itself). The early Church to be a disciple specifically close to Jesus. They believe he wrote a Gospel. A modern view has emerged recently that postulates instead that it may have been written by someone and is, therefore, more second-hand knowledge than had it been written by John himself. It is written by a convert from Judaism to Christianity, and most likely someone of a professional status in the early Church and good education in the Jewish Scriptures.

There are questions, too, about the nature of why the gospel was written, and questions about the place in which it was written. John is a distinct gospel, standing alone in style and content. Indeed, Edwin Blum points out that John has 93% original content compared to the Synoptic Gospels.

Therefore, scholars must look at the prevailing themes within the text as a means of understanding the purpose behind the particularities of the writing of John.

The main purposes for writing the Gospel of John, according to the writers of the gospel, are found within the gospel itself, in John 20:30–31:

*'Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that **Jesus is the Christ**, the Son of God, and that believing you may have **life in His name**'*

Jesus as Christ

The main message of the Gospel of John is made abundantly clear in the above quotation. The writer (or writers) wishes to make one thing very clear – that they believed Jesus was the Christ. If the Gospel of John is believed to have been written by a Jewish Christian with good knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures, the use of the word *Christ* here is interesting.

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³⁰ Edwin Blum, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* [Victor Books], ed. by John F Walvoord & Roy Zuck

The English 'Christ' comes from a Greek word, *Christós*, which roughly translates to 'anointed one'. It is a Greek translation of the Hebrew term *Messias*, also meaning 'anointed one'. Clearly, Christ and Jesus as the Messiah are closely linked, as they mean almost the exact same thing.

The significance of the imagery of anointment is important to analyse here. The idea is deeply rooted in Jewish tradition – indeed, returning once more to the symbolism of the prophet Samuel was led by God to select the new King of Israel. In doing so, he selected David, anointing him with oil. This is found in 1 Samuel 16:12–13:

And the Lord said, 'Arise, anoint him, for this is he.' Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed David in the midst of his brothers. And the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon David from that day on.

So, clearly, referring to Jesus as the anointed one is important; it sets him apart as someone who distinguishes Jesus as being a person whom God has chosen in order to fulfil a particular role. Referring to Jesus as the Messiah / Torah / Old Testament figures who had been recorded as having been anointed by God, and referring to him with one of these figures by signalling that he too is anointed by God is a theological statement of great importance, and the resulting importance of his message.

Further to the analysis of Jesus' name – 'Christ' is a term given to Jesus by the Greeks, a moniker during the time of his lifetime, although in the Gospel of Mark he is referred to by his disciples as being the Christ in answer to the question 'Who do you say I am?'. His name, Jesus (Joshua in the Hebrew form), means 'The Lord Will Save'. Based on external evidence, it is clear that this was indeed his name, and is certainly on theme for the message of the Gospel of Mark.

Son of God

The title of Jesus as 'Son of God' is present in John as well as Matthew and Mark. While it is true that Jesus was not just the Christ but also the Son of God, John is making a clear, and for many in Judaism, potentially dangerous statement: he is equating the person of Jesus with God. This is a statement that within the realm of first-century Jewish discussion is considered a grave sin, and Jesus was killed.

This is an idea echoed throughout John, perhaps most clearly in the well-used John 3:16: *For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.* This indicates that by referring to Jesus as the Son of God through whom salvation and eternal life may be given through him rather than through the traditional methods of the temple-based rituals, such as the yearly sacrificial rites of Yom Kippur. This took away from the High Priests, who were specifically placed within society in the privileged position of being the ones able to carry out such rituals.

Within the Gospel of John, the use of the phrase Son of Man is used specifically in connection with specific messages about the view of the person of Jesus held by the Johannine Community.

John 4:24 (*'God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in the Spirit and in truth'*) suggests that the Son of God in the physical sense that humans have come to understand, as it postulates that Jesus is not a being. This is a very important thing to stress in the understanding of Jesus as Son of God, as he is begotten rather than the product of biological reproduction. In this way, the Gospel of John presents Jesus as the Son of God but simultaneously human.

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Life in His Name

This is the final facet of the verse which calls Christians to live their lives in the name of Jesus. What does this verse mean then?

The early Church was establishing itself as a new faith, and, given that the Johannine community was expelled from the Jewish community at the time, this verse is an indication that the community was making a departure from their traditional way of life. A new way of living is offered which is defined by the name of Jesus rather than a life defined by the practice of Judaism.

It is distinctive as it refers to an ongoing belief, somewhat of a statement of purpose. The idea that a new faith system is being challenged in the trials of the early Church, as described in the trials of Stephen in Acts 8 being a clear example of the persecution of the early Church).

In the true vine simile made in John, the writers record Jesus as having instructed the disciples to 'abide in me and I in you' (John 15). This is a call to ongoing relationship, as the relationship between the vine and the branches is constantly ongoing and necessary for the vine to continue to survive, thrive and produce fruit. It is a call to ongoing relationship and reliance not only on God, but specifically on Jesus. This would lead to the idea that a relationship with him would still be possible despite his physical absence from earth. Therefore, there is a further spiritual element to this; not only do they live with the spirit of Jesus, they are proclaiming to live with Jesus' spirit, the Holy Spirit.

Spiritual Gospel

This is a gospel in which the stories all have a large depth of spiritual and theological meaning. It is not simply a recording of stories but a well-written and intentional collection of stories with spiritual meanings designed to be provocative in the readership.

The idea of the Gospel of John as a Spiritual Gospel was first put forward by Clement of Alexandria. He considered that the Synoptic Gospels could be seen as containing the 'bodily facts' of Christ's life, while the Gospel of John was considered a far more theological, spiritual text which is more geared towards presenting a picture of who Jesus was within the realm of theological importance rather than historical. Since Clement of Alexandria put forward this idea, the Gospel of John is seen by the vast majority of scholars to be a more theologically purposed gospel, rather than a gospel which historically accounts for such things.



Indeed, it was a literary style which was common at the time, as historical accounts were not necessarily designed to record actual events but rather to proffer different perspectives. Many scholars have posited that the Gospel of John might not be the best source for a historical account of the factual life of Christ, but rather a good source regarding the beliefs and theology of the time period in which the Gospel of John is believed to have been written (late 1st century).

As previously stated, Hooker believed that the key to understanding the Gospel of John as a Spiritual Gospel, which was established firmly in the introduction/Prologue. She argued that the fact that the Gospel is a theological poem, is indicative that this gospel is spiritual. The Synoptic Gospels, by contrast, are seen as more historically focused, and, when compared to the Gospel of John, they display the different intent of the gospels.

Scholars have pointed towards the strong theme of spiritualising of everyday objects in the Gospel of John. For example, things such as bread and water, key aspects of the Jewish tradition of the time period, become important spiritual symbols in the bread of life discourses and the water from which those who drink will never thirst (4:7–15).

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Within the sayings of Jesus contained within the Gospel of John, there is usually a contrast between what Jesus says and phrases he uses. To use the example of John 4:7–15, Jesus here turns a discourse about quenching his thirst and that of the woman at the well to become a discourse about offering to her in the spiritual sense. This interaction involved a misunderstanding about the way to a deeper theological point, or revelation, about Jesus and his purpose. There are other occasions in John, including the discourse with Nicodemus, and the interaction between Jesus and the Samaritan woman in 4:38–42. When analysing why the gospel writers may have felt the need to inject this answer could once again lay within the context in which they were living – that Jesus was speaking to Jews (one of the target audiences of John) during his time, and his true message could only be understood in this context.

Gospels for Jews and Gentiles

Within Jewish discussion and thought at the time, there was a colloquial distinction between the Jews, and the Gentiles. A Gentile was any kind of person who was not Jewish. Greeks and Gnostics alike would be classed as 'Gentile' despite their own differences. The word which, at the time, referred to someone who was not an Israelite, the Israelites being the chosen people of God. Therefore, the idea within the New Testament of offering grace and favour by God to the Gentile was a new and relatively countercultural idea.

The way in which the readership interprets these texts at the time varies hugely depending on, namely, whether those reading are Jewish or Gentile. Furthermore, Jesus himself was Jewish, from a Jewish family and raised in a Jewish community, and, therefore, the Jewish scriptures and traditions have heavily influenced him. It is important to consider this influence, as well as the context of Jewish culture in order to understand Jesus' message and how it is portrayed throughout the Gospel of John. This consideration is no different when examining the Gospel of John.

Specifically, the presentation of Jesus within the Gospel of John as a new temple, which the gospel would appear to be geared towards a Jewish audience. Following the destruction of the Temple in AD 70, the Jewish community were dealing with a crisis of identity regarding themselves as a nation, as the temple was an incredibly central facet of Jewish identity in the first-century era. Within the Gospel of John, Jesus is presented as a new temple, and a new system of belief, multiple times (including 1:14, 1:51, 2:18–22 and 4:20–24).

There is a particular tone of John that points towards the Jews; the heavy amount of allusions would lend the text towards the Jewish readership, as these allusions would be familiar to them. Indeed, among modern readership, even with the knowledge today of the Old Testament, many of the deep textual allusions will be missed.

Fulfilment of Scripture

John's constant recalling of Old Testament prophecy is not just plainly obvious to the reader, but also overtly stated within the text itself. For example, John 19:36 states that, 'the scripture would be fulfilled'. Throughout John there is a constant theme of typology, where actions recorded by John about Christ as being fulfilment of Scripture. It is a theme that is both overt and subtly time and time again throughout the gospel, so clearly this was an important part of the writers regarding their intent for what their message would be and how it would be received.

This is important because this is one of the ways in which the writers of the Gospel of John were speaking towards the audience of a Jewish community reeling from the destruction of the temple. It is the fulfilment of the old system which has been destroyed, and following of his way of living as an alternative form of living. As previously indicated, the situation in which the Johannine community illuminates the purpose of the Gospel of John as being a gospel which has been written for a Jewish community in mind. By underlining the idea of Jesus as the fulfilment of Scripture, the writers are intentionally placing Jesus as a new way to follow God when they are undergoing the destruction of the temple.

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Given the idea of John as a spiritual gospel rather than a historical account of the scholars to argue that the repeated nature of this facet of the Gospel of John under the theological end goal of the Johannine community. John repeatedly throughout the Gospel of John refers to the fulfilment of Scripture, using a combination of testimony about actions or events and references to Scripture in order to demonstrate how the events from Christ's life were repeated throughout the entirety of the Gospel of John, including but not limited to:

- John 12:38
- John 13:18
- John 15:25
- John 17:12
- John 18:9
- John 19:24
- John 19:28
- John 19:36

Modern Scholarship

One of the main issues regarding the reading of John as a gospel for the Jews is that it is repeatedly presented as being in opposition to Jesus and his message. This may, however, be seen as John as being a gospel for the Jews despite the heavy use of Old Testament imagery and themes in opposition – a negative light.

Brown points towards the context in which John was written as being a source to the purpose of the authorship of John regarding the Jews and how they functioned. The community was largely located within Asia Minor, and the result of this location was that scholars believed that the presented tensions between Jesus in the Gospel of John had been less historical and more a picture of the Jewish–Christian tensions being experienced by the community at the time of the writing of the gospel. Passages such as John 9:22 and people being thrown from synagogues for proclaiming their belief that Jesus was the Son of God, this might have been influenced by the experience of the writers of the gospels and writing into the gospels of real-life experiences by this community.

Brown specifically focused on this development of the conflicts and how it manifested, drawing on a specific stage of development within the community itself rather than the community – with the gospel itself targeting six groups – three Christian, three non-Christian – and draw them further into the Christian faith. Brown then shows how this is then followed by conflicts within the Epistles – before the eventual rise of Gnostic beliefs.

Brown is not, however, the only scholar to have an opinion on this, as other New Testament scholars argue that the tensions between these communities represented in John are not necessarily reflective of the tensions within the communities themselves. They might also argue that such themes in the Gospel of John are an overemphasis within scholarship on the first-century conflicts between the Jewish and Christian communities. This view is supported by the fact that the Jews within the Gospel of John function largely as a literary device, and perhaps this conflict is just used as a literary tool to demonstrate both the opposition to Jesus at the time (which did not necessarily have to come from the Jewish community) and the tensions within the community of writers of John under the emperor Domitian (AD 81–96). This particular tension is referred to as 'Lord' and 'God', which contradicted Christian thought and practice.

Therefore, while the Jews in John may be presented as a source of opposition and more reflective of the tensions within the community itself, or just as a literary device to support the teachings of Jesus.

This, however, is not the only view within scholarship on this issue. In his book *His Gospel*, Dodd argues that the comparison of John to the Synoptic Gospels reveals the authorship of John.

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He argues that it reveals that John was obviously written independently – he posits drawing on independent sources and those within the community of writers. It is this community which holds significance for Dodd, as he posits that John was written in this community with the view to direct their message towards an audience of non-Christians.

This view of purpose of the authorship in the thought of Dodd believed to colour the text itself. Dodd ascribes less importance to the tensions within the Jewish-Christian community. Instead, Dodd envisions these issues and these themes as being as a result of the influence of John. Hellenistic and Jewish ideas are merged – Jewish references to Scripture and engagement are used in order to make the Spiritual Gospel appeal to as many people as possible from all backgrounds.

Dodd also draws attention to the Prologue once again in his discussion of the purpose of the gospel. The presence of the idea of the Logos is the crux of his ideas. He argues that this is probably after the summary of the gospel and the main theological points had already been made. The device intended to be provocative and to underline to the audience the purpose of the gospel – to place such an idea at the beginning plants the seed of purpose in the minds of the audience as they hear the account in John.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

In pairs, discuss which of the purposes of John you feel was of the most importance of the gospel.

Choose one, and make your case for why you think it was the most important purpose.

Quick Quiz

1. What is meant by the term 'Johannine community'?
2. What type of gospel do scholars believe John is?
3. What significance does Jesus as the Son of God have?
4. How does John communicate the ongoing belief?
5. Why is this significant for the time John is thought to have been written?
6. Give an example of an everyday object which is given spiritual significance.
7. How does John appeal to Gentiles?
8. How does John appeal to the Jewish readership?
9. What historical event would have impacted this reading?
10. What does John 19:36 communicate?

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ANSWERS TO QUICK Q

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1.1 Prophecy Regarding the Messiah

1. 'Anointed One'
2. The idea of a foretold Messiah which would restore peace for the Jewish people.
3. Isaiah 53
4. He was of the line of David, as the Messiah in Isaiah 53 was.
5. A military leader
6. The motif in the gospels (mostly Mark) where Jesus tells his followers to keep his status secret.
7. Any relevant example, including, but not limited to, Mark 8:29–30
8. Through the use of proof texts linked to birth narratives, for example.
9. Including, but not limited to, the massacre of Innocents and Jeremiah 31:15
10. Reveal Matthew's drive to establish Jesus as Messiah.

1.2 The World of the First Century and the Significance of this Context for the Life of Jesus

1. They lived constantly in accordance with Jewish purity laws.
2. A religious group with social and political power
3. A good one
4. A religious Jewish group focused on holiness
5. A religion-political group against the Roman occupation, largely nationalistic.
6. High Priests were the highest authority in the temple, responsible for conducting religious rituals. Chief Priests were the second highest authority who were responsible more for the day-to-day running of the temple.
7. There were two opposing impacts of Hellenisation to Jewish culture – one response was to become assimilated to the Greco-Roman culture, and the other was a form of ghettoisation into separate groups.
8. Messianic expectation and nationalistic fever
9. The lack of citizenship for Jews due to their refusal to acknowledge Roman gods as their protectors.
10. The ethical dilemma of having to choose between their faith and their situation as a minority.

2.1 The Prologue in John

1. The Hellenistic features are reflected in the inclusion of the Prologue as was the custom in Greek literature.
2. 'The Word'
3. It communicates a universal theological view of Jesus.
4. It would provoke
5. John 1:4–5
6. John 1:12–13
7. Indicate that their 'special status' as the chosen people of God would now be extended to all who believe in Jesus. It would sit well with many of the Jewish readership of the time.
8. Idea of the concepts of grace and truth as tied to Jesus being juxtaposed with the legalistic approach of the Jewish tradition.
9. A negative view, or negative role
10. As they reject Jesus and his message – an attempt by the Johannine community to state their position against the Jewish tradition.

2.2 Titles of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels and Selected 'I am' Sayings in John

1. Students could give any of the following examples: Son of God, Son of Man, Bread of Life, Light of the World, etc.
2. It underlines his divine nature.
3. The humanity of Jesus is being emphasised.
4. The idea that sustenance can be found here.
5. John 8:12
6. John 10:11
7. John 15:1
8. It is farming imagery familiar to the addressed group. It would communicate the idea of continuing on, pruning oneself, spiritual growth and the source of nourishment and life.
9. Brown argues that here Jesus is intentionally using this imagery in order to portray himself as the true vine.
10. Students could include any relevant verses, including but not limited to: Psalm 80:8–9, Isaiah 52:1, Ezekiel 15:1–8, 17:5–10, 19:10–14 and Hosea 10:1

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2.3 Miracles and Signs

1. To show Jesus' divinity
2. Fulfills Old Testament promises about abundance of wine in messianic passages.
3. John 4:43–54
4. It communicates importance of believing without seeing.
5. It was the Jewish day of rest, which meant that in performing the healing, Jesus broke the Sabbath.
6. John 6:1–24
7. It demonstrated Jesus' power over matter.
8. Isaiah 43:2
9. It symbolised and demonstrated how those who had previously been socially ostracised were now part of a new movement of faith in Jesus.
10. Intended to show Jesus' power in restoring life.

3.1 Interpreting the Text and Issues of Relationship, Purpose and Authorship

1. The interrelated nature of the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke.
2. This is the idea that Matthew and Luke were authored by people with access to the Gospel of Mark and were influenced by it.
3. Source criticism is the study of the sources which were used to inform the forming of the Canonical Gospels.
4. Form criticism is the practice of analysing the texts by organising them by type or form.
5. Redaction criticism is the study of how the texts of the Bible were arranged, edited or revised by those who compiled the now-accepted order and canon.
6. The two-source theory for the Synoptic Gospels is the idea that the interrelated nature of the Gospels was caused by the consultation of two sources during the writing of the gospels of Matthew and Luke. The first is widely believed to be the Gospel of Mark itself (this is known as '**Marcan priority**') and the second is a collection of sayings of Jesus.
7. The Griesbach hypothesis flips the idea of Marcan priority on its head somewhat, arguing that Matthew was written first, followed by Luke, and that these two texts were then used by the author of Mark.
8. The Infancy Gospels / The Gospel of Thomas
9. This is a less popular hypothesis that refers to the idea that there are four sources for the Synoptic Gospels and two other sources specific to Matthew (known as M) and Luke (known as L).
10. M, Q or L

3.2 The Purpose of Authorship of the Fourth Gospel

1. The group or community responsible for writing the Gospel of John
2. Spiritual Gospel
3. By emphasising in this passage that Jesus was not just the Christ but also the Son of God, the author makes a statement that, in the world of first-century Judaism, potentially dangerous statement: he is equating Jesus with God of the Old Testament.
4. Via the motif and repeated encouragement for believers to pursue '*life in His name*'.
5. After the fall of the Second Temple, Jews were looking for identity as a people.
6. Bread and water
7. Opens up the possibility of salvation to the Gentiles which had previously not been possible.
8. Makes repeated and emphatic reference to Old Testament tradition and Jewish laws.
9. The Fall of the Second Temple in AD 70
10. That Jesus is considered the fulfilment of Old Testament Scripture.

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