



Papyrus Codex ^p66 (Bodmer II), c. AD 200, Foundation Martin Bodmer
Bibliothèque et Musée, Geneva, Switzerland.

This codex, or ancient book, is one of the earliest complete copies of the New Testament and is open to the Greek text of John 6:51-57, which comes from the end of Jesus's famous Bread of Life sermon. The page begins with "The bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

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The Distinctive Testimonies of the Four Gospels

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Church curriculum for Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John generally follows a harmony approach. This method reconstructs the life of Jesus Christ by merging all the Gospel accounts and hypothesizing a chronology.¹ This approach has ancient roots: Tatian, an early Christian apologist, used the four Gospels to create one single harmony, the *Diatessaron* (c. AD 175).² This text was very influential in Syria during the third and fourth centuries.

A harmony approach has some advantages, including providing a comprehensive view of what the Gospels record of the Savior's life and teachings. This approach, however, also has some limitations. For example, no harmony of the Gospels can provide a complete account of Christ's life because the Gospels were essentially individual testimonies written for different audiences and were not intended to be all-inclusive accounts of Christ's life and teachings. Significantly, the Joseph Smith Translation designates the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of John as "testimonies" rather than "gospels."³ Elder McConkie stated, "It is apparent . . . that each inspired author had especial and intimate knowledge of certain circumstances not so well known to others, and that each felt impressed to emphasize different matters because of the particular people to whom he was addressing his personal testimony."⁴

Another limitation of the harmony approach is illustrated by Papias, a second-century church leader who quoted John the presbyter's statement that Mark "wrote down accurately, *but not in order*, all that [Peter] remembered of the things said and done by the Lord."⁵

As a further complication, the Gospels of Matthew and Luke sometimes record a different order of events than does the Gospel of Mark. Because the Gospels occasionally differ in their order of events, scholars have a difficult time establishing a precise chronology for a harmony.⁶

A third limitation is that a harmony approach obliterates the unique emphases of the individual Gospel writers. While there is much that the Gospel authors agree upon, each has written to a different audience, with a different purpose in mind. John's Gospel, in particular, contains an abundance of material not found in the other Gospel accounts. Yet even the synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke, which relate many of the same events and teachings—present their shared material in ways that are unique to their Gospels. In other words, each Evangelist wrote his account for a specific purpose and expected that his portrait of the Savior would be seen as complete in itself.⁷

Modern readers can learn much from the Gospels by examining *what* they chose to include and *how* they chose to write it. In this article, we will examine some of the ways that each author has presented the life and teachings of the Savior. Such a study will allow teachers and readers to appreciate better the distinctive contributions of each Gospel to our understanding of the life and teachings of our Savior.⁸

This article will discuss dating, authorship, and provenance of each Gospel and then summarize the distinctive witness of Jesus Christ that each account provides. The scope of this article does not allow a complete, detailed examination; instead, we will focus on some of the general themes. The notes contain additional sources that will aid readers who wish to investigate further. This study will begin with Mark's Gospel because it is likely the earliest of the synoptics.⁹ We will then continue with Matthew and Luke, who are likely dependent upon Mark's account, noting some ways that they have edited the Gospel of Mark and included their own unique material. Finally, we will conclude with the most unique Gospel, written by John.

The Gospel of Mark

Of the four Gospel writers, Mark is the only one to call his work a "gospel": "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1). The identification of the first four books of the New Testament as Gospels, therefore, originates from Mark's introduction. The word *Gospel* comes from the Greek word *euangelion*, which means "good news."¹⁰ The good news of Jesus Christ is that He came to earth to perform His mission for us (see 3 Nephi 27:13–21).

Dating, authorship, and provenance. Most scholars date the Gospel of Mark to the time of the Jewish War (c. AD 66–73). This dating is due, in part, to the Savior’s reference to the destruction of Herod’s Temple (see Mark 13:2) that occurred in AD 70. For scholars who do not accept the possibility of prophecy, Mark’s Gospel could not have been written before that event. But as Joel Marcus has concluded, “In favor of a pre-70 dating is the probability that Jesus actually prophesied the Temple’s destruction, as did other Jewish prophets down through the centuries; . . . a prophecy of its end, therefore, would not require a post-70 date.”¹¹ Some early Christian traditions claim that Mark wrote his Gospel around the time of the death of Peter, which occurred in Rome in AD 64 or 65.¹²

Mark is often identified with “John, whose surname was Mark,” the missionary companion of Paul during the Apostle’s first mission (Acts 12:25). According to the book of Acts, John Mark left that mission early to return to Jerusalem (see Acts 13:13). The cause for John Mark’s early departure is unknown, but it later caused a temporary rift between Barnabas and Paul when, in preparation for their second mission, Barnabas wanted to bring along John Mark but Paul refused (see Acts 15:37–38). Whatever the reason, later tradition claims that Mark continued faithful in the gospel. Papias preserved the following information concerning Mark’s later relationship with Peter: “Mark became Peter’s interpreter and wrote down accurately, but not in order, all that [Peter] remembered of the things said and done by the Lord. For [Mark] had not heard the Lord or been one of his followers, but later, as I said, a follower of Peter. Peter used to teach as the occasion demanded, without giving systematic arrangement to the Lord’s sayings.”¹³

If this tradition is accurate, Mark did not actually witness the events he included in his Gospel but rather wrote down the things he heard Peter teach about the Savior’s ministry. The importance, therefore, of Mark’s Gospel is that it may record the memories of the leader of the fledgling post-resurrection Church.

Internal evidence strongly suggests that the Gospel of Mark was written for a Gentile, or non-Jewish, audience. For example, Mark interprets Aramaic phrases for his readers, such as “Talitha cumi” (Mark 5:41) and “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?” (Mark 15:34). Mark also explains Jewish customs and ideas.¹⁴ If Mark’s audience were Jewish and spoke Aramaic, there would be no need for such explanations. Significantly, Matthew, who was indeed writing to a Jewish audience, omits Mark’s explanations of these Jewish concepts in his Gospel.¹⁵

Eusebius, a Christian historian from the fourth century, reported a tradition that Mark wrote his Gospel in Rome.¹⁶ Internal evidence from the text also supports this tradition. First, Mark mentions Roman customs,¹⁷ which Matthew omits.¹⁸ In addition, although Mark's Gospel was composed in Greek, he often employs Latin terminology.¹⁹ He twice interprets Greek terms with Latin explanations.²⁰ These features seem to indicate that Mark wrote his Gospel to a Gentile, possibly a Roman, audience.

Noteworthy themes and perspectives on Christ. Overall, the Gospel of Mark emphasizes that even though Christ's enemies opposed Him, His mortal ministry was misunderstood (even by His disciples and relatives) and that although He died a humiliating death upon the cross, the Savior ultimately triumphed over all things. Although a number of themes recur throughout this Gospel, we will mention just four prominent examples. A large portion of the Gospel of Mark deals with the theme of Jesus's authority, as well as opposition to that authority.

1. Rather than opening with a birth narrative, the Gospel of Mark begins with the Savior's baptism by John the Baptist (see Mark 1:9–10). Thus, early in his Gospel, Mark establishes the Savior's identity by quoting God the Father's divine approval: "Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11). This approval is the foundation from which Mark can demonstrate Jesus's authority over Satan and his forces when Jesus casts out an unclean spirit (see Mark 1:23–26), cures the fever of Peter's mother-in-law (see Mark 1:30–31), and heals the leper (see Mark 1:40–42). As the Savior asserts His authority, He meets intense opposition from Satan and his forces (Mark 1:12–13), the scribes and Pharisees (Mark 2:16–17), and eventually the chief priests (Mark 14:1). Examples of this theme of opposition are repeated throughout Mark's Gospel.²¹

2. The Gospel of Mark shows that misunderstanding affected Jesus on a deeply personal level. Although the Savior demonstrates His authority to the house of Israel, they do not completely understand His identity (see Mark 1:27; 4:11–12; 8:27–28). Notwithstanding the Savior's commission to the Apostles to teach His message and use His authority (see Mark 3:14–15), His own disciples do not entirely comprehend His true identity, nor do they fully grasp the scope of His earthly mission (see Mark 4:36–41). When Jesus returns to His hometown of Nazareth, instead of receiving Him with open arms, the townspeople reject Him (see Mark 6:1–4). Perhaps most disturbing of all is that apparently members of Jesus's own family rejected Him (see Mark 3:21).²² The Savior, of course, knew that such rejection would be the reaction to His message and mission. Just as John was "handed over" (*paradidōmi*) because of

his preaching, so would the Savior suffer the same fate (Mark 1:14; see also 14:41, where “betrayed” is also *paradidōmi*). The parable of the sower also emphasizes the idea that most people would indeed reject the Savior (see Mark 4:3–8).²³

3. The Gospel of Mark emphasizes the idea of secrecy surrounding the Messiah’s mission. From the inception of His ministry, Jesus commands those that He encounters to keep quiet about Him. For example, when the Savior cast out an evil spirit, He declared, “Hold thy peace, and come out of him” (Mark 1:25).²⁴ After Jesus heals the leper, He commands, “See thou say nothing to any man” (Mark 1:44). Mark hints that Jesus is intentionally keeping people in the dark about certain aspects of His mission (see Mark 4:11–12). Even when Peter finally declares by inspiration Jesus’s true identity as the Messiah, the Savior “charged them that they should tell no man of him” (Mark 8:30). In addition, after the sacred experience upon the Mount of Transfiguration, the Savior again “charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen” (Mark 9:9). Scholars since the early twentieth century have called this theme in Mark “the Messianic Secret.”²⁵

Why would Jesus command others to keep quiet? One reason is logistical—that is, if too many people crowded around the Savior, He simply could not accomplish His work as effectively. When the healed leper was commanded to keep quiet, he disobeyed “and began to publish it much, and to blaze abroad the matter” (Mark 1:45). The result of this disobedience was that “Jesus could no more openly enter into the city, but was without in desert places: and they came to him from every quarter” (Mark 1:45). A more important reason for the secrecy is apparent, however, because neither the disciples nor Jews in general understood what *kind* of Messiah Jesus was. Rather than being a powerful military or political figure, Jesus was to be a *suffering* Messiah. When Jesus started to teach His disciples about His messianic mission, their reactions demonstrate why Jesus kept it a secret for so long. After Peter’s famous confession, Jesus taught, “The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again” (Mark 8:31). Peter’s reaction is unexpected by modern readers: “And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him” (Mark 8:32). Even when Peter understood by revelation that Jesus was the Messiah, Peter still did not know what *kind* of Messiah Jesus was. Later, when Jesus told the disciples He would suffer and die (see Mark 9:31), still “they understood not that saying, and were afraid to ask him” (Mark 9:32).²⁶ According to Mark, nobody fully understood the

mission of the Savior before the suffering of Gethsemane and the cross.

4. Mark's culminating theme is the Savior's final vindication in spite of opposition, misunderstanding, and suffering. Each time Jesus taught His disciples that He would suffer and die, He included the important reality that He would also rise from the dead (see Mark 8:31; 9:31; and 10:34). Ironically, following Mark's narration of the Crucifixion, the Roman centurion gives readers a glimmer of hope by declaring, "Truly this man was the Son of God" (Mark 15:39). The women take the body of Jesus and wrap it in linen (see Mark 15:46), but when they return to the sepulcher after the Sabbath, they find the stone already rolled away and a man inside dressed in white—but they do not find the body of Jesus (see Mark 16:4–5). The messenger confirms that Jesus's prophecy is indeed fulfilled: "He is risen; he is not here" (Mark 16:6). The Savior of the world, who was opposed and misunderstood by all who knew Him and suffered and died a humiliating death, has triumphed over all things and has risen again!²⁷ He appeared as a resurrected being to Mary Magdalene, two unnamed disciples, and finally to the Apostles (see Mark 16:9, 12, 14). The triumph of the Savior in the Gospel of Mark reaches its completion as "he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God" (Mark 16:19).

In the early days of the New Testament church, Christian missionaries such as the Apostle Paul struggled to deal with the scandal caused by the Crucifixion: "But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness" (1 Corinthians 1:23). Why didn't more people readily accept Jesus the crucified Messiah? Mark's Gospel offered an explanation—from the beginning, people completely misunderstood the nature of the Savior's mission. Mark's Gospel also offered hope—in spite of continued misunderstanding and opposition to the message of the Savior, Jesus Christ has risen from the dead and rules, vindicated, in heaven. In these respects, the Gospel of Mark is as relevant today as ever.

The Gospel of Matthew

The Gospel of Matthew was very influential among early Christians.²⁸ Tertullian, one of the early church fathers (c. AD 155–230), describes Matthew as the "most faithful chronicler of the Gospel."²⁹ In this dispensation, the Prophet Joseph Smith often used the first Gospel in his sermons.³⁰

Dating, authorship, and provenance. Because of Matthew's dependence on Mark's Gospel, the Gospel of Matthew is normally dated after about AD 75.³¹ Most scholars date it to sometime between AD 80 and

95.³² In spite of the fact that modern scholars have debated the authorship of this Gospel, ancient Christian writers are unanimous in ascribing it to the tax collector named Matthew identified in Matthew 9:9.³³

Although we may never be able to identify a specific community in a specific city as Matthew's intended audience, clues from both external and internal evidence help us draw some broad conclusions. Although we do not know his source, Eusebius says, "Matthew at first preached to the Hebrews, and when he planned to go to others also he wrote his Gospel in his own native tongue for those he was leaving."³⁴ Internal evidence from the Gospel itself seems to confirm that the intended audience was Jewish.³⁵ Unlike Mark, Matthew does not explain Jewish concepts for his audience, such as the washing of hands (15:2) and the use of phylacteries (23:5); he uses Aramaic terms such as *raka* (5:22) and *korbanas* (27:6, translated as "treasury"), without any explanation; and he prefers Jewish phrases such as "kingdom of heaven" (thirty-two times) instead of "kingdom of God." In addition, Matthew begins his work with a genealogy that links Jesus with the royal Davidic line and with Abraham, the father of the covenant (see Matthew 1:1–17).

In the text, three characteristics of Matthew's editorial hand suggest that his audience was in tension with, or had recently split with, the synagogue. Matthew is the only Gospel author to include Jesus's sayings where he referred to the "church" (*ekklēsia*; Matthew 16:18; 18:17), and in his editorial passages, the synagogue is always referred to as "their" or "your" synagogue (Matthew 4:23; 9:35; 12:9; 13:54; 23:34).³⁶ Additionally, Matthew referred to "their scribes" (authors' translation of *grammateis autōn*; Matthew 7:29), whereas Mark used "the scribes" (*hoi grammateis*; Mark 1:22). All these Matthean characteristics point to an "us" and "them" situation for Matthew's audience. Some scholars have argued that this situation reflects a time during the Jamnian period (AD 70–100) when Judaism was seeking to define itself after the destruction of the temple.³⁷ Rifts within Judaism, however, were not exclusive to this period and may reflect an earlier period.³⁸

The tension with the synagogue may account for an important element of Matthew's Gospel: the tension over the role of the Gentiles within the Christian community. Matthew is the only Gospel author to mention two of Jesus's sayings that restrict missionary work among the Gentiles. The first is in the apostolic commission in Matthew 10 where Jesus specifically directs the Twelve, "Go not into the way of the Gentiles and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (vv. 5–6). The second is Jesus's response to the Syro-Phoenician woman who pled with him

to heal her daughter in chapter 15. He told His disciples, “I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (v. 24). These sayings, however, are offset in the Gospel with a number of places that emphasize the positive qualities of the Gentiles: Matthew includes four Gentile women in his account of Jesus’s genealogy (Tamar, Rachab, Ruth, and Bathsheba, or “the wife of Urias,” 1:3–6); he portrays the Wise Men as Gentiles who recognize and worship the Christ child when Herod and the chief priests and scribes do not;³⁹ and he is the only Gospel writer to emphasize the great faith of two Gentiles—the centurion (8:10–12) and the Syro-Phoenician woman (15:28). These instances, along with the final commission to go and teach “all nations” (28:19), suggest that Matthew’s Gospel was written to encourage his Jewish audience to accept and embrace the Gentile mission.⁴⁰ This reading of Matthew makes good sense of Eusebius’s statement that Matthew wrote his Gospel “when he planned to go to others also.”⁴¹

Noteworthy themes and perspectives on Christ. Matthew wrote his Gospel to testify that Jesus is a tangible manifestation that God has not abandoned His people. Matthew is the only Gospel author to provide an *inclusio*—two bookends that tie together the theme of his Gospel. At the beginning, he records the angel’s declaration that the Christ child should be called “Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us” (Matthew 1:23). It is through the coming of this child that God will be manifest among His people. The Savior’s teachings and miracles are manifestations of God’s love and power. Then the Gospel’s concluding verse records His final words to the disciples, “I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28:20). Even though He was physically leaving them, He, as God, would continue to be with them. Everything within Matthew’s Gospel must be understood within this framework. We will briefly discuss just two aspects of Matthew’s portrayal of Jesus: His fulfillment of the Old Testament and His role as the Messiah.

1. Matthew uses a number of literary techniques to show that Jesus was the fulfillment of the Old Testament. For example, he goes to great lengths to demonstrate that Jesus fulfills Old Testament prophecy.⁴² In some cases, he employs a specific quotation formula—variations of which were “to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet.”⁴³ In each of these cases, the quotation is either inserted into Markan passages or is found in unique Matthean material.⁴⁴ He also records numerous other scripture references without the quotation formula.⁴⁵ During the description of Jesus’s arrest, Matthew specifically records Him saying, “But *all this was done*, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled” (Matthew 26:56; emphasis added).

Matthew portrays Jesus as the new Moses. He does so in three ways. First, he is the only Gospel author to include the account of Joseph taking his family into Egypt (see Matthew 2:13–23). Second, he is the only author who records that Jesus, like Moses, gave a new law on a mountain (see Matthew 5:1). In contrast, Luke records the sermon that is given on a plain (Luke 6:17). Third, just as Moses wrote five books of the Torah, Matthew records Jesus giving five sermons: the Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5–7), the Apostolic Commission (chapter 10), the Parable Discourse (chapter 13), the Community Rules Discourse (chapter 18), and the Olivet Discourse (chapters 24–25). It is evident that Matthew intended his audience to link these speeches together because at the end of each of the first four sermons, he writes, “and when Jesus had ended these sayings/parables . . .” (7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1); but at the end of the final speech, he writes, “when Jesus had finished *all* these sayings . . .” (26:1; emphasis added).⁴⁶

In addition to these carefully developed ties with the Old Testament, Matthew makes numerous allusions to Old Testament themes and practices. The testing of Jesus in the wilderness after His baptism reminds readers of Israel’s testing in the wilderness in Deuteronomy, and His discussions on the Sabbath and responses to the Pharisees in chapter 12 are all rooted in the Old Testament. As one New Testament scholar notes, in all of this, “the fuller [the readers’] knowledge of the Old Testament, the richer will be their understanding of the significance of Jesus as he is presented in Matthew’s pages.”⁴⁷

Matthew also shows that Jesus is the fulfillment of the law of Moses—not in a way that negates or minimizes the law but in a way that “raises the bar.”⁴⁸ Here we must be careful to differentiate between the law and the “fences around the law”—or the oral tradition that the Pharisees developed. Matthew records numerous occasions when Jesus denounces the oral traditions. The most scathing is found in Matthew 23.⁴⁹ But Jesus’s teachings about the law itself are very different. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus emphasizes that He expects a higher level of righteousness. Two verses again act as bookends. In Matthew 5:20, Jesus declares, “For I say unto you, That except your righteousness [*dikaiosunē*] shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.” Then, in the first verse of chapter 6, we read, “Take heed that ye do not your righteousness [*dikaiosunē*] before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven” (authors’ translation). In between these two verses, we have the six antitheses: “Ye have heard . . . but I say unto you . . .” (Matthew 5:21–48). In each of these

antitheses, the “ye have heard” portion refers to the teachings of the law, whereas the “but I say unto you” portion refers to the “raising of the bar” that Jesus expects from His disciples. Righteousness, therefore, is not a product of Pharisaic legalism; rather, it is in the “weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith” (Matthew 23:23).

2. Matthew’s portrayal of Jesus as the Messiah is complex. He uses titles such as “Christ,” or “anointed one,” “the Son of Man,” “King of the Jews [or Israel],” and “Son of God.” Each of these titles has powerful ties with Old Testament expectation. One title, however, is particularly important in the first half of his Gospel, although this title was not prominent in Jewish messianic expectation: Jesus is the “Coming One.” This title influences the way Matthew composes chapters 3–11. The title “Coming One” is closely tied to two important passages dealing with John the Baptist. The first, in Matthew 3, describes John preaching and baptizing in the Judean wilderness. After some Pharisees and Sadducees request to be baptized, John condemns them as a “generation of vipers” because they believe that salvation is assured by their lineal descent from Abraham. John, however, declares that unless they bring forth fruits of repentance, they will be “hewn down, and cast into the fire” (Matthew 3:7–10). Then John declares, “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but the coming one [*ho erxomenos*] [who is] after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize with the Holy Ghost, and with fire” (v. 11; authors’ translation). In contrast to Matthew, Mark (1:7) and Luke (3:16) do not use *ho erxomenos* in their accounts.⁵⁰ Matthew makes no explicit mention here of the identity of the “Coming One,” although he implies that it refers to Jesus by following the prophecy with the description of Jesus’s baptism.

The next reference to John the Baptist in Matthew’s Gospel is found in chapter 11. By this time, John was in prison and sent his disciples to Jesus to inquire if He was the Coming One (*ho erxomenos*) (v. 3). Immediately, the reader is reminded of Matthew’s account of John’s earlier prophecy to the Pharisees and Sadducees. Jesus did not answer John’s disciples directly. Instead, He told them, “Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them” (verses 4–5).⁵¹ Jesus’s response is significant for a number of reasons. First, it portrays the “Coming One” in a different light than John’s expectation in Matthew 3:10 where He is an axe who will hew down any tree that does not bring forth good fruit. In Matthew 11,

however, Jesus is the “Coming One” who heals and preaches. This outcome was not a common messianic expectation in Jesus’s day.⁵²

This portrayal of a healing and preaching Messiah influenced the Matthean order in chapters 5–9. Matthew identified these chapters as a single literary unit by using verse 23 of chapter 4 and verse 35 of chapter 9 as bookends. The language of both verses is almost identical. These chapters, in chiasmic format, provide the evidence for Jesus being the expected “Coming One.” The evidence that Jesus taught the gospel to the poor is the Sermon on the Mount, where the opening line is “Blessed are the poor” (Matthew 5:3). Prior to Matthew 11, the opening beatitude is the only verse that uses the word “poor” (*ptōxoi*).⁵³ Likewise, Matthew 8–9 offers specific examples of Christ healing the blind, the lame, the lepers, and the deaf (see Matthew 11:5).⁵⁴ It appears that Matthew arranged the material in chapters 5–9 to provide evidence for his readers that Jesus was indeed the “Coming One.”

Matthew, therefore, highlights the truth that God is with His people. Jesus’s coming to earth was the fulfillment of a plan that had been in place from the very beginning. Israel may have rejected their God, but He had not rejected His people, even though the Gentiles would have a place in His kingdom. Instead of coming as a judge, which He will do at the end of time, God first sent His Son to teach and heal His people, both physically and spiritually.

The Gospel of Luke

The longest Gospel account is written by Luke. This Gospel is actually the first volume of a two-volume set, and the two volumes were meant to be read together—the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts. Luke addresses both books to a person by the name of “Theophilus” (Luke 1:3 and Acts 1:1). Because the name *Theophilus* was common among both Jews and Gentiles in the Greco-Roman world, most scholars conclude that Theophilus was a real person whom Luke knew personally.⁵⁵ However, because the *Theophilus* means “friend of God,” we can also apply it to ourselves as we read Luke’s writings—we are also friends of God who are being invited to seek the truth about the Savior in Luke’s Gospel.

Dating, authorship, and provenance. The dating of the Gospel of Luke, like that of Matthew, depends on the dating of the Gospel of Mark. If Mark wrote his Gospel sometime between AD 66 and 73 and if Luke used the Gospel of Mark as a source, then Luke must have written his Gospel after AD 75. Many scholars, therefore, date the Gospel

of Luke to sometime between AD 80 and 90.⁵⁶ Scholars do not agree on the place where Luke composed his Gospel, although various cities outside of Palestine have been proposed.⁵⁷

Early Christian tradition preserved in the Muratorian Canon fragment of the second century states that Luke was a doctor and a missionary companion of the Apostle Paul: "This physician Luke, after Christ's ascension, since Paul had taken him with him as a companion of his travels, composed it in his own name according to his thinking. Yet neither did he himself see the Lord in the flesh."⁵⁸ Because of this tradition, the Gospel writer is normally identified with Luke the physician who is mentioned in Paul's letters (see Colossians 4:14; see also Philemon 1:24; 2 Timothy 4:11). Like the Muratorian Canon, Luke himself says that he was not an eyewitness to the mortal ministry of the Savior (see Luke 1:1–3)⁵⁹ but apparently was a disciple who converted after the Resurrection. A few sections in the book of Acts are narrated in the first person rather than the third person.⁶⁰ Some scholars conclude that these first-person accounts are evidence that Luke was personally present during parts of Paul's second and third missionary journeys.⁶¹

The Gospel of Luke, like the Gospel of Mark, seems intended for a predominantly Gentile audience. Luke shows an interest in those things that may have been a concern in a non-Jewish culture. For example, whereas the genealogy of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew begins with Abraham, the father of the Jews, the genealogy of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke goes all the way back to Adam, the father of humanity. Luke's contrast emphasizes that Jesus was the Savior for all the world and not just for literal descendants of Abraham. Luke also commonly omits elements in the Markan source that would have been of interest primarily to a Jewish audience, including some Jewish religious traditions as well as some Hebrew or Aramaic names or titles.⁶²

Further evidence that Luke was writing for a Gentile audience is his geographical terminology and emphases. First, sometimes Luke uses the term "Judea"—not in the specific sense of the province south of Galilee and Samaria but in a generic sense of the whole of Palestine, including Samaria and Galilee.⁶³ Judea was the most famous area in Palestine. This wording may indicate that Luke's intended audience was not as familiar with the less-well-known geographical areas. In addition, Luke seems to emphasize the most famous city of Judaism, Jerusalem. For instance, both the Gospels of Matthew and of Luke include the three temptations of the Savior in the wilderness. But whereas Matthew concludes the Savior's triumph over the temptations on a high mountain in the wilderness (see Matthew 4:8–10), Luke's account culminates

with the Savior at Herod's Temple in Jerusalem (see Luke 4:9–12). The ending of the Gospel of Luke contains another example. Whereas the three other Gospels all narrate the final appearance of the Savior in Galilee (see Matthew 28:16; Mark 16:7; John 21:1), Luke concludes his Gospel in the city of Jerusalem (see Luke 24:49–53).

Noteworthy themes and perspectives on Christ. The Gospel of Luke possesses a number of striking themes.

1. One of Luke's most important motifs is that Jesus Christ is the universal Savior of all mankind.⁶⁴ He stresses that the gospel is for everyone, not just for the privileged of society or the literal descendants of the house of Israel. One of the most noteworthy examples of this theme is Luke's emphasis on the importance of faithful women who played essential roles as disciples of the Savior. Comparing Matthew's and Luke's birth narratives, we can observe that Matthew emphasizes Joseph's point of view (see Matthew 1:19–25). Luke's version, however, includes sacred experiences from the perspective of His mother, Mary (see Luke 1:26–38), as well as the testimonies of Elisabeth (see Luke 1:39–45) and Anna (see Luke 2:36–38). Luke is the only Gospel writer to mention that faithful women disciples accompanied Jesus and His Apostles and “ministered unto him of their substance” (Luke 8:1–3). Both the Gospels of John and Luke contain important information about Jesus's disciples Mary and Martha, but Luke is the only one who includes the Savior's praise of Mary for choosing the “good part” by carefully listening to the teachings of the Master (Luke 10:42). Like the Gospel of Mark, the Gospel of Luke also shows that faithful women disciples were witnesses of the Savior's death (Luke 23:49) and the ones who were entrusted to declare to the Apostles the wonderful news that He had risen from the dead (Luke 23:55–56; 24:1–10).⁶⁵

In addition to the special notice paid to women, Luke emphasizes the universal nature of the Savior's ministry by highlighting His concern for the poor and outcast. Whereas Matthew's Sermon on the Mount presents Jesus's teaching, “Blessed are the poor in spirit” (Matthew 5:3), Luke's Sermon at the Plain reads, “Blessed be ye poor” (Luke 6:20). In another comparison, Matthew records, “Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all *that are in the house*” (Matthew 5:15; emphasis added). The statement “in the house” may be a veiled reference to Jewish converts, who are already literally in the house of Israel. In contrast, Luke contains the following: “No man, when he hath lighted a candle, putteth it in a secret place, neither under a bushel, but on a candlestick, that they which come in may see the light” (Luke

11:33; emphasis added). The conclusion, “they which come in,” may be a veiled reference to Gentile converts who, although not literal descendants of Israel, “come in” to the fold by baptism.⁶⁶ Whereas the other Gospels include the Savior’s commission of His Apostles to teach the gospel, only Luke also includes the commission of the Seventy to further the work of teaching the gospel to everyone (see Luke 10:1–12).⁶⁷ This theme is continued throughout the book of Acts as the disciples become witnesses of the Savior “both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

2. Luke further emphasizes the fact that the spreading of the message of the Savior was not left to chance but was the will of God carried out through the power of the Holy Spirit. Luke’s is the only Gospel that begins with prophecies that John the Baptist will prepare the way before the Messiah and that the Savior Himself would be born—all by the power of the Spirit (see Luke 1:15, 35). Elisabeth was filled with the Spirit at the salutation of Mary (see Luke 1:41). Both Zacharias and Simeon were filled with the Spirit when they prophesied concerning John and Jesus respectively (see Luke 1:67; 2:25–27). The Savior, who was filled with the Spirit (see Luke 3:22), came to baptize others with that same Spirit (see Luke 3:16). The Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to triumph over Satan (see Luke 4:1). The mighty deeds of the Savior are continually performed by the power of the Spirit (see Luke 4:14, 18). Jesus powerfully proclaims that God is willing to give the Spirit to His children (see Luke 11:13) but also warns of the serious consequences for those who speak blasphemy against the Spirit (see Luke 12:10).

3. The Gospel of Luke places a heavy emphasis on Jerusalem and the temple as focal points of the Savior’s life and ministry. Luke is the only Gospel writer to include the important events that take place at the temple in Jerusalem just prior to and after the birth of John the Baptist and Jesus. While Zacharias was performing his priestly duties in the temple, the angel Gabriel appeared to him to announce that Zacharias and his wife would have a son in their old age (Luke 1:5–22). After Jesus was circumcised, Jesus’s parents brought Him to the temple, where Simeon and Anna testified concerning the Savior (Luke 2:22–38). When Jesus was twelve years old, His parents brought Him to Jerusalem for the Passover, and in the temple, the young boy astonished the doctors of the law with His understanding (see Luke 2:42–48).⁶⁸ As mentioned above, whereas Matthew culminates the triumph of Jesus over the temptations of the devil in the wilderness (see Matthew 4:8–10), Luke does so at the temple in Jerusalem (see Luke 4:9–13). Like the other synoptic Gospels, Luke includes Jesus’s

admission to His disciples that He must suffer and die and rise again (see Luke 9:22; 9:44), but only Luke also includes the teaching that these things “he should accomplish at Jerusalem” (Luke 9:31).

4. Although the bulk of the Savior’s ministry occurred in Galilee, Luke shows how the attention of Jesus is riveted on the mission He must accomplish in Jerusalem. After Jesus taught His disciples concerning His death, “he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51). Luke’s narrative from chapter 9 onward concentrates the reader’s attention on the holy city. As Jesus continues His mission, preaching and performing miracles, Luke reminds readers that the Savior never lost focus as “he went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem” (Luke 13:22).⁶⁹ When He arrives in Jerusalem, the Savior teaches the people in various ways.

More than any other Gospel, Luke shows that the Savior of the world met His foreordained fate with dignity and bravery.⁷⁰ Luke presents Jesus Christ as the Savior of the world, just as the prophet Jacob testified: “He cometh into the world that he may save all men if they will hearken to his voice; for behold, he suffereth the pains of all men, yea, the pains of every living creature, both men, women, and children, who belong to the family of Adam” (2 Nephi 9:21).

The Gospel of John

The Gospel of John is unique among the four Gospels. In antiquity, it was the last of the Gospels to be recognized by the orthodox church, and scholarship once doubted its historical reliability as a purveyor of Jesus’s words and deeds, preferring the synoptic Gospels.⁷¹ In recent years, however, the scholarly pendulum has swung in favor of the reliability of the fourth Gospel. Archaeology has found and has excavated the pool of Bethesda with its five porches (see John 5:1–2).⁷² The Dead Sea Scrolls show that John’s use of dualism between light and darkness (see John 1:5; 3:19; 12:35–36), which some scholars attributed to second-century philosophy, is at home in the Palestinian milieu of the first century.⁷³ In addition, John’s knowledge of Samaritan beliefs, of worship on Mount Gerizim, and of the site of Jacob’s well are all accurate.

Dating, authorship, and provenance. In its present form, John’s Gospel probably dates from AD 90 to 110. The *terminus ad quem* (the latest possible date) can be fairly accurately calculated because of the discovery of a small piece of papyrus containing parts of John 18:31–33, 37–38. This papyrus, known as P⁵², was discovered in Egypt in 1935 and dates to circa AD 125.⁷⁴ It is the earliest New Testament manuscript fragment

discovered thus far. Scholars believe that p⁵² is a copy rather than the original document. Therefore, they have arrived at the *terminus ad quem* by factoring in time for the original document to have been copied and taken to Egypt. However, we should note that the Gospel of John also contains material that dates to a much earlier period.

The fourth Gospel received its name because the majority, but not all, of the early Christian witnesses understood the author to be the unnamed disciple who leaned upon the Savior's breast during the Last Supper (see John 13:23). The Gospel itself makes this claim in John 21:20–24. The early Christians identified that disciple as the Apostle John.⁷⁵ Modern readers, however, should realize that John's Gospel, like the synoptic Gospels, shows that others also took part in shaping our present version. For example, John the Baptist, rather than John the Apostle, seems to have been responsible for much of the material contained in John 1. Verse 19 states that what follows in verses 20–34 is the record of John, and the context clearly identifies John as the Baptist, not the Apostle. In addition, Doctrine and Covenants 93 strongly suggests that the prologue (see John 1:1–18) also belongs to John the Baptist (vv. 6–18).⁷⁶ It is not unusual that the Apostle included the account of John the Baptist given that he was first a disciple of the Baptist's.

Others may possibly have had a hand in the final form of the Gospel as it has come down to us in the New Testament. For example, John 21:24 reads, "This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things: *and we know that his testimony is true*" (emphasis added).⁷⁷

Noteworthy themes and perspectives on Christ. In antiquity, Clement of Alexandria wrote that John, "aware that the external details had been recorded in the Gospels, was urged by his disciples, and divinely moved by the Spirit, to compose a spiritual Gospel."⁷⁸ Scholars likewise acknowledge that Gospel of John has a "high Christology," a term indicating that the divine element of Jesus is emphasized. We see Jesus making frequent, specific declarations of His divine nature and messianic responsibilities. The brevity of this article does not allow a discussion of all the noteworthy themes in the fourth Gospel, so we have highlighted just four.

1. Unlike the synoptic Gospels, John includes a prologue with an account of Jesus in the premortal existence (see John 1:1–14). In the premortal existence, Jesus was the *logos*, the Word of God. As such, he was with God and, in fact, was God (1:1; see also Abraham 3:24); He was the creator of the world and the source of life and light for mankind (John 1:4). Why does John use the metaphor of the "Word" to introduce his Gospel? Doctrine and Covenants 93:8 defines the

Word as “the messenger of salvation.” In John’s Gospel, however, the emphasis of how Jesus brings salvation is different from the synoptic Gospels. For example, John does not include a description of the sacrament. His sacramental teachings come in the Bread of Life discourse in chapter 6. Neither does John give a description of the Gethsemane experience. Rather, he includes a description of Jesus’s washing of the Twelve’s feet (John 13; cf. D&C 88:137–141) as the symbol of His sacrifice on our behalf.

The point of the prologue is that the *logos* was made flesh; He condescended to come to earth.⁷⁹ Although He is the one who comes “from above” and does not belong to this world (see John 3:31; 8:23), His ministry on earth is to help those who belong to this world to raise their sights and see as He sees. Throughout John’s Gospel, therefore, we find Jesus in numerous conversations with those who belong to this world: His mother (see John 2:1–4), Nicodemus (see John 3:1–13), the Samaritan woman (see John 4:7–25), and the Pharisees (see John 8:12–59). In each case, He uses the conversation to help His earthly dialogue partners raise their sights to recognize who He is and also to help them come to know the Father. When He speaks, He reveals the words of God (John 8:40; 14:10, 24); when He acts, He performs the will of God (see John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38). Thus, as Doctrine and Covenants 93 notes, He becomes the messenger of salvation because He reveals the Father to us (see D&C 93:8, 19). “And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:40).

2. A second theme introduced in the prologue is the contrast between light and darkness, appearing first in John 1:4–5. “In him [the Word] was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in the darkness; and the darkness comprehendeth it not.” We have already noted that the dualism between light and darkness is important for John’s Gospel. Jesus is the source of all light, and because light is essential for life to exist, He is also the source of all life. Darkness, by definition, is the absence of light, so if Christ is represented by the metaphor of light, Satan is represented by the metaphor of darkness. Therefore, when John records that Nicodemus came to Jesus “by night,” he is making a statement about Nicodemus (see John 3:2; 7:50)—one that Jesus calls attention to in John 3:19, “And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.” Therefore, we should not be surprised when John emphasizes that when Judas left to betray Jesus, “it was night” (John 19:39).

In contrast to the darkness, the Gospel of John records poignant statements about light. At the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus publicly declared, “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12). Later, He taught the people, “Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth. While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light. . . . I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness” (John 12:35–36, 46).

3. A third theme introduced in the prologue builds on conflict between light and darkness. This theme is not readily apparent in the King James Translation of John 1:5. The word translated into English as “comprehendeth” is the third singular aorist active indicative verb: *katalambanō*. In its most basic sense, it means to “overcome” or to “seize.” If verse 5 is read with this translation, it describes the conflict between light and darkness before the world began: “And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness did not overcome it [that is, the Light].” Thus, John begins his Gospel with a description of the War in Heaven. One of his major emphases here and in the book of Revelation is that although Satan has power to wage war with the Light in the premortal life and here on earth, he could not overcome it there, and neither will he be able to do so in mortality.

4. The fourth theme we will mention is Jesus’s declaration that He is the “I AM.” The most significant declaration is in John 8, where Jesus has been in conversation with the Jews over the issue of the seed of Abraham. The Jews claimed Abraham for their father, but Jesus denied their claim: “If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham. But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham” (vv. 39–40). Rather, He continues, “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning and abode not in truth because there was no truth in him” (v. 44). In contrast, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad” (v. 56).

This conversation is another example where the one from above has a conversation with earthly dialogue partners who have a very limited perspective. When the Jews challenged Jesus by saying, “Thou art not fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?” Jesus responds with the famous statement, “Before Abraham was, I am [*egō eimi*]” (vv. 57–58). Jesus claims that He was the Jehovah of the Old Testa-

ment (see Exodus 3:11–14). This time it is clear that His dialogue partners understood exactly what He was saying because “then took they up stones to cast at him.” Declaring Himself to be Jehovah was tantamount to blasphemy in their eyes, and they responded accordingly. The only other time they try to stone Him in John’s Gospel is when He declares, “I and my Father are one” (John 10:30–31).

In John’s Gospel, however, are found several other places where Jesus identifies Himself as the I AM. Some of the sayings, like 8:58, use *egō eimi* in an independent sense without a predicate but are not translated as such in the King James Version. For example, when Jesus converses with the Samaritan woman at the well, she declares, “I know that Messiah comes, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things” (John 4:25). The King James Version translates His response as, “I that speak unto thee am he” (John 4:26). This translation, however, does not do justice to the *egō eimi*. A more literal translation is, “I am, the one who speaks to you.” Likewise, when Jesus walked on the water toward His disciples, He says, “It is I; be not afraid.” But the literal translation is, “I am; be not afraid” (John 6:20). In a number of other sayings, *egō eimi* is used with a predicate. Scholars have long suggested that in these, Jesus uses *egō eimi* to make a statement of His divinity. Thus, Jesus declares *egō eimi* “the Bread of Life” (6:35), “the light of the world” (8:12; 9:5), “the door” (10:7, 9), “the good shepherd” (10:11), “the resurrection and the life” (11:25), “the way and the truth and the life” (14:5), and “the true vine” (15:1).

The Gospel of John is very different from the synoptic Gospels, but it provides a powerful witness of the identity and ministry of Jesus Christ. The prologue provides the platform from which John builds his testimony of the Savior. In addition, we have seen how the numerous “I AM” references bear frequent testimony that Jesus is the Jehovah of the Old Testament. There is no messianic secret in John’s Gospel. Rather, it was written that all of us “might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing [we] might have life through his name” (John 20:31).

Conclusion

Students and teachers have much to gain by considering how each Gospel highlights individual aspects of the Savior’s ministry and paints an individual portrait of the Savior. When the authors sat down to compose their texts, they fully intended that each would be read as a complete and independent document, not just one part of an amalgamation of Jesus’s life. Although the creation of a harmony of Jesus’s life

is a useful aid, it has significant limitations. Concerning this, Richard Neitzel Holzapfel made the following analogy:

If we had four mosaics giving different representations of the same scene, it would not occur to us to say, “These mosaics are so beautiful that I do not want to lose any of them; I shall demolish them and use the enormous pile of stones to make a single mosaic that combines all four of them.” Trying to combine the pieces would be an outrageous affront to the artists. Because the four Gospels are different from each other, we must study each one for itself, without demolishing it and using the debris to reconstruct a life of Jesus by making the four Gospels into one Gospel.⁸⁰

We cannot, given the limitation of space, describe in detail all the nuances of each Gospel writer’s testimony of Christ. Rather, we have endeavored to focus a spotlight on a few of the individual contributions of each of the Gospels, hoping that readers will have the desire to add an additional dimension to their study of Christ in the New Testament. We submit that, even in classes that use a harmony approach, an understanding of the distinctive testimonies of the four Gospel authors will reward both the teacher and the students.

Notes

1. This is the approach used, for example, in James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1915); Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah*, 4 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1979–81); and Church Educational System, *The Life and Teachings of Jesus and His Apostles* (Religion 211–12) (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1978).

2. An English translation of the Arabic version is found in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 10 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 10:42–129. In antiquity, Ephrem the Syrian wrote a commentary on the *Diatessaron* (see Carmel McCarthy, *Saint Ephrem’s Commentary on Tatian’s Diatessaron: An English Translation of Chester Beatty Syriac MS 709 with Introduction and Notes* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1993]).

3. See Scott H. Faulring, Kent P. Jackson, and Robert J. Matthews, eds., *Joseph Smith’s New Translation of the Bible: Original Manuscripts* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2004), 235 and 442. For a convenient collection of the Joseph Smith Translation changes in the New Testament, see Thomas A. Wayment, ed., *The Complete Joseph Smith Translation of the New Testament* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005).

4. Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965–1973), 1:69.

5. Quoted in Eusebius, *Church History*, 3.39.15, in *Eusebius: The Church History*, trans. Paul L. Maier (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1999).

6. For example, Luke places John the Baptist’s imprisonment (3:19–20) *before* the baptism of Jesus (3:21–22). In Mark and Matthew, the imprisonment takes place

some time after the baptism (Mark 6:17–29; Matthew 14:3–12). In this instance, logic favors the chronology presented by Mark and Matthew over that of Luke. In other instances, the decision is not so straightforward. For example, in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus raises Jairus's daughter immediately after John's disciples ask about fasting (see Matthew 9:14–19, 23–26), but in Mark's and Luke's Gospels, the two events are separated by three chapters (Mark 2:18–22; 5:22–24, 35–43; Luke 5:33–39; 8:41–56). Determining the chronology in this instance is much more difficult.

7. For a discussion on the importance of reading Matthew as a whole, see Ulrich Luz, *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 1–21.

8. See Robert C. Patch, "The Gospel in the Gospels," *Ensign*, September 1974, 38–41.

9. Together, Matthew, Mark, and Luke are often referred to as the synoptic Gospels. The term *synoptic* means to "see with" or "see together," so the synoptic Gospels present the life of the Savior in similar ways. The similarities are so significant that many scholars have proposed a literary relationship among the first three Gospels. The most common explanation for this literary relationship posits that Mark's Gospel was written first (known as Markan Priority) and that Matthew and Luke then used the Gospel of Mark as a source for their own accounts (see Robert H. Stein, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels: Origin and Interpretation*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001], 49–96).

Although not all scholars are convinced by this explanation, three points in particular make this conclusion plausible. First, Matthew and Luke generally follow the Markan sequence of events, even though Papias said that Mark did not record them in precise chronological order. When Matthew and Luke disagree with Mark's chronology, the differences can usually be explained as a result of Matthean and Lukan editorial tendencies. Significantly, Matthew and Luke never agree on the sequence of events when they differ from Mark.

Second, evidence suggests that Matthew and Luke try to correct the Markan account. For example, when Mark uses a rare or difficult word, Matthew and Luke write the passage with more common terminology. They also often improve his grammar. For more detailed discussions, see W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 3 vols., *The International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 1:105–6, and Stein, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels*, 56–59.

Third, one reason for concluding that the Gospel of Mark is the earliest Gospel is the fact that it is the shortest. It is more likely that Matthew and Luke later added additional material about the life of Christ than that Mark purposefully omitted so many good stories about the Savior. On the contrary, Mark does not tend to shorten stories because when Matthew, Mark, and Luke contain the same story, Mark often preserves the longest version. For examples, see Stein, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels*, 50–56.

10. Frederick William Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 402.

11. Joel Marcus, *Mark 1–8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 38.

12. R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: New International Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 37.

13. Quoted in Eusebius, *Church History*, 3.39.15–16.

14. Recall in Mark 12:42 that Mark explains the Jewish coin “mite” by referring to the Roman coin “farthing.” See also Mark 7:1–4 where Mark mentions that the Pharisees were upset with the disciples for not washing their hands before eating and then explains in some detail the Jewish concern for cleanliness with respect to eating and cooking.

15. Compare, for example, Mark 7:1–4 with Matthew 15:1–2.

16. “When, by the Spirit, Peter had publicly proclaimed the Gospel in Rome, his many hearers urged Mark, as one who had followed him for years and remembered what was said, to put it all in writing. This he did and gave copies to all who asked. When Peter learned of it, he neither objected nor promoted it” (Eusebius, *Church History*, 6.14.6–7).

17. For example, Mark mentions the Roman custom of four watches during the night (see Mark 6:48; 13:35). Mark also alludes to the Roman law that allowed wives to divorce their husbands (see Mark 10:11–12).

18. Compare, for example, Mark 13:35 with Matthew 24:42 and also Mark 10:11–12 with Matthew 19:9. Significantly, Jewish law contains no allowance for wives to divorce their husbands (see Deuteronomy 24:1).

19. For example, *legio* (“legion;” Mark 5:9,15), *speculator* (“executioner;” Mark 6:27), *denarius* (“penny” and “pence;” Mark 6:37; 12:15; 14:5), *fragulare* (“scourge;” Mark 15:15), and *centurio* (“centurion;” Mark 15:39, 44, 45).

20. See Mark 12:42, “two mites [Greek: *lepta duo*], which make a farthing [Latin: *quadrans*],” and Mark 15:16, “into the hall [Greek: *aulēs*], called Praetorium [Latin: *praetorium*]” (see William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974], 24).

21. A nice summary of these issues can be found in Donald H. Juel, *A Master of Surprise: Mark Interpreted* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994).

22. The King James Version translation “his friends” (literally “those of him” in the Greek) does not seem to take into consideration the complete context and probably should be translated as “relatives.” A few verses later, the group that was seeking Him is identified as His family (see Mark 3:31–32). Jesus himself asserted that “A prophet is not without honor, but in his own country, and *among his own kin, and in his own house*” (Mark 6:4; emphasis added). In any event, John’s Gospel confirms that at least Jesus’s brothers rejected Him during His mortal ministry (see John 7:3–5).

23. On this, see Frank F. Judd Jr., “The Parables of Matthew 13: Revealing and Concealing the Kingdom of God,” in *The Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ, Vol. 2: From the Transfiguration through the Triumphal Entry*, ed. Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Thomas A. Wayment (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006), 74–97.

24. Ironically, in Mark’s Gospel, the demons are the only individuals who actually understand Jesus’s identity (see Mark 1:24) before the crucifixion (compare Mark 15:39).

25. The first scholar to use this term was William Wrede, *The Messianic Secret*, trans. J. C. G. Greig (Cambridge: J. Clarke, 1971); repr. of *Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien: zugleich ein Beitrag zum Verständnis des Markusevangeliums* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1901).

26. Jesus teaches the disciples a third time about His imminent suffering and death, but Mark does not record the reaction (see Mark 10:33–34).

27. Some early manuscripts of the Gospel of Mark end at Mark 16:8 when the women flee in fear and do not say anything to anyone. Other manuscripts add verses 16:9–20. Even if the Gospel of Mark did originally end at 16:8, modern scripture confirms that the Savior's final declaration is nonetheless true. Compare Mark 16:15–18 with D&C 84:65–72 and Mormon 9:22–24.

28. It seems to have been referred to by Peter (2 Peter 1:16–18) and James (James 1:13; 2:13; 3:5–6, 18; 4:8, 11; 5:12), although they may be using a similar source. It is quoted in the writings of Ignatius (*To the Ephesians* 14.2; *To the Smyrnaeans* 1.1; 6.1; *To Polycarp* 2.2), and the Didache (1.4; 3.7; 7.1; 8.2; 9.5; 13.2). It was the only book of scripture used by the Ebionites (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.26.2), and the Valentinians, Marcionites, and Basilidians also taught from it (Clement, *Stromata* 7.17).

29. Tertullian, *On the Flesh of Christ*, 22.

30. Joseph's proclivity toward Matthew is demonstrated in a survey of the scripture index in *Scriptural Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith with scriptural annotations by Richard C. Galbraith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1993), 462–67. This index contains 545 references to Matthew; 96 references to Mark, 233 references to Luke, and 274 references to John.

31. The earliest fragments of Matthew's Gospel (p⁶⁴ and p⁶⁷) date from the late second century. Scholars now recognize that both of these papyri belong to the same manuscript (see Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 4th ed. [New York: Oxford University Press, 2005], 53).

32. See Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 1:138.

33. For one discussion of the issues of authorship, see Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1–7: A Continental Commentary*, trans. Wilhelm C. Linss (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 93–95. The unanimity among ancient authors is significant because at times they did question the authorship of texts (see Eusebius, *Church History*, 3.3.1–5; 6.14.1–3).

34. Eusebius, *Church History*, 3.24.6.

35. Eusebius preserves a famous statement from Papias, which reads: "Matthew compiled the sayings [logia of Christ] in the Hebrew dialect, and each interpreted them as best he could" (*Church History*, 3.39.16). Although many scholars have interpreted this statement as referring to Matthew's Gospel, there are major difficulties with doing so because it was written in Greek, not Hebrew. The phrase "in the Hebrew language" may mean "in Jewish forms of expression" (see Graham N. Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People: Studies in Matthew* [Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992], 116).

36. In Matthew 4:23, Matthew may be using the Markan phrase "their synagogues" (Mark 1:39), but, unlike Mark, Matthew repeats it in 9:35. In the other instances, Matthew has added the pronoun to the Markan passages (Matthew 12:9; 13:54). There is no Markan parallel for Matthew 23:34.

37. See W. D. Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 256–315; Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People*, 113–45.

38. Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 15–16.

39. Bruce R. McConkie suggests that the Wise Men were probably diaspora Jews (*The Mortal Messiah: From Bethlehem to Calvary*, 1:358). This opinion may indeed be the case, but for Matthew, they were Gentiles. In Matthew's Gospel, only Gentiles use the phrase "King of the Jews" (see Matthew 27:11, 29, 37). In

contrast, the scribes and elders called Him mockingly “King of Israel” (Matthew 27:42).

40. For a more extensive discussion, see Gaye Strathearn, “Jesus and the Gentiles,” in *The Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ*, 2:302–17.

41. Eusebius, *Church History*, 3.24.6.

42. Luke also makes reference to the idea that Jesus was the fulfillment of the Old Testament—but to a much lesser degree (see Luke 4:21; 21:22, 32; 22:16; 24:44).

43. See Matthew 1:22–23; 2:15, 17–18, 23; 4:14–16; 8:17; 12:17–21; 13:35; 21:4–5; 27:9–10.

44. Luz, Matthew 1–7, 156.

45. See Matthew 2:5–6; 3:3; 4:4, 6–7, 10; 5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43; 9:13; 10:35; 11:10; 12:7, 40; 13:14–15; 15:4, 7–9; 18:16; 19:4–5, 7; 19:18–19; 21:9, 13, 16, 42; 22:24, 32, 37–38; 43–44; 23:39; 24:30; 26:31, 64; 27:45.

46. This literary practice was first identified by B. W. Bacon, *Studies in Matthew* (New York: Holt, 1930).

47. R. T. France, *The Gospel According to Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 41.

48. On this, see Frank F. Judd Jr., “The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount,” in *The Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ, Vol. 1: From Bethlehem through the Sermon on the Mount* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005), esp. 323–29.

49. See also Matthew 12:1–13; 15:1–20; 19:3–9, 16–22.

50. In Mark and Luke, we have the articular use of the substantive comparative adjective *isxuros* as the subject of the conjugated definite verb *erxomai*, whereas Matthew uses the nominal substantive attributive participle of *erxomai* with the present indicative of the verb *eimi*. John’s account, like Matthew’s, uses *ho erxomenos*, but like Mark, John does not include the story of John’s disciples coming to Jesus.

51. This passage is not found in Mark, but it is included in Luke (7:22), which may suggest that it comes from Q (see Gaye Strathearn, “Matthew as an Editor of the Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ,” in *How the New Testament Came to Be*, ed. Kent P. Jackson and Frank F. Judd Jr. [Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University and Deseret Book, 2006], 144–46).

52. One possible exception is a messianic fragment from the Dead Sea Scrolls (4Q521) that describes God, through His Messiah, giving sight to the blind, raising the dead, and preaching to the poor.

53. We do not know how the early Christians identified the Sermon on the Mount, but the modern title was not used until the fourth century AD when Augustine coined it (*Reply to Faustus the Manichaean* 5.3). In antiquity, people often identified a text by a word or phrase from the opening line. For example, Akkadian documents refer to the Babylonian creation story as the Enuma Elish (“when on high”), and the Hebrew titles for the books of the Torah all come from the opening words of the text.

54. “The blind receive their sight” = Matthew 9:27–31; “the lame walk” = Matthew 9:1–8; the lepers are cleansed” = Matthew 8:2–4; “the dead are raised up” = Matthew 9:18–19, 23–26. The only difficulty is finding an example of the deaf hearing, but this is a difficulty found only in the English text, not the Greek. The Greek word for *deaf* in Matthew 11:5 is the plural of *kōphos*, the same word

used to describe the demoniac who is dumb (*kōphos*; Matthew 9:32–33).

55. See François Bovon, *Luke 1* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002), 23.

56. See Donald Juel, *Luke–Acts: The Promise of History* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1983), 7.

57. See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 2 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1981, 1985), 1:57; Juel, *Luke–Acts: The Promise of History*, 8.

58. English translation is from Harry Y. Gamble, *The New Testament Canon: Its Making and Meaning* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 93.

59. The words “they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses” should be more properly translated as “they who were eyewitnesses from the beginning delivered them unto us.” See the discussion of these verses in Judd, “Who Really Wrote the Gospels?” 125–27.

60. See, for example, Acts 16:10–17; 20:5–15; 21:1–18; 27:1–44; 28:1–16.

61. These first-person accounts may also possibly provide evidence that Luke was using as a source the travel diary of someone else who accompanied Paul. Luke explicitly tells his audience that he used previously written sources from eyewitnesses to compose his Gospel (see Luke 1:1–3). Unfortunately, we do not have enough evidence to determine with certainty which of these options is correct. On this, see Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 322–27.

62. See Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 1:57–59.

63. For references, see Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 1:58.

64. Although Matthew and Mark use the phrase “son of God” to describe Jesus, Luke is the only synoptic Gospel to also use the significant title “Savior” (Luke 1:24, 69; 2:11; Acts 3:13–14).

65. Luke’s companion volume, the book of Acts, also contains numerous references to faithful women disciples (see, for example, Acts 1:14; 5:14; 8:3, 12; 9:2, 36; 12:12–15; 16:14–15; 17:12, 34; 18:26; 21:8–9).

66. For this comparison and conclusion, see Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 1:478.

67. Some early manuscripts, such as Sinaiticus (c. fourth century AD) and Alexandrinus (c. fifth century AD), have “seventy,” whereas others, such as P^{75} (c. 3rd century AD) and Vaticanus (fourth century AD), have “seventy-two” (see Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. [Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994], 126–27).

68. The King James Version reads, “They found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions” (Luke 2:46). The Joseph Smith Translation modifies the last part of that verse: “And they were hearing him, and asking him questions” (Wayment, *The Complete Joseph Smith Translation of the New Testament*, 152).

69. See also Luke 17:11: “And it came to pass, as he went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee.”

70. See Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 124–25, esp. Box 8.4.

71. Not until the second half of the second century do we find this Gospel quoted by the church fathers. Prior to this time, however, various Gnostic groups used it. This may be one reason why the church fathers were slow to accept it. One Gnostic, Heracleon, was the first person to write a commentary on the Gospel of

John (Elaine H. Pagels, *The Johannine Gospel in Gnostic Exegesis: Heracleon's Commentary on John*, Society of Biblical Literature, Monograph Series 17 [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1973], 16).

72. John J. Rousseau and Rami Arav, *Jesus and His World: An Archaeological and Cultural Dictionary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 155–57. James H. Charlesworth notes the significance of this find: “No other ancient writer—no author or editor of the Old Testament, the Pseudepigrapha, not even Josephus—mentions such a significant pool in Jerusalem. Moreover, no known ancient building was a pentagon, which was apparently what John was describing with the five porticoes” (“Reinterpreting John: How the Dead Sea Scrolls Have Revolutionized Our Understanding of the Gospel of John,” *Bible Review* 9 [1993]: 20).

73. James H. Charlesworth, “The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Gospel according to John,” in *Exploring the Gospel of John: In Honor of D. Moody Smith*, ed. R. Alan Culpepper and C. Clifton Black (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 65–97. Charlesworth argues for a direct link between John and Qumran. In this, he has probably exceeded the evidence. See David E. Aune, “Dualism in the Fourth Gospel and the Dead Sea Scrolls: A Reassessment of the Problem,” in *Neotestamentica et Philonica: Studies in Honor of Pader Borgen*, ed. David E. Aune, Torrey Seland, and Jarl Henning Ulrichsen, Supplements to Novum Testamentum 106 (Boston: Brill, 2003), 281–303. Aune shows that there is a greater affinity with other Jewish sources than the Dead Sea Scrolls.

74. p⁶⁶, dating from circa AD 200, contains the text of John 1:1–6:11 and 6:35b–14:15. The remains of John 14–21 are very limited by the fragmentary nature of the text. p⁷⁵, dating between AD 175 and 225, is “a single-quire codex and Luke and John” (Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 4th ed. [New York: Oxford University Press, 2005], 56–59).

75. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3.1.1. For a conservative discussion that argues for Johannine authorship, see Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John, A Commentary*, 2 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 1:81–115. Not everyone agrees, however. In antiquity, some identified the author as the Gnostic Cerinthus (Epiphanius, *Panarion* 51.3,1–6; Eusebius, *Church History*, 3:28; Dionysius, *The Works of Dionysius Extant Fragments*, 1.3, as translated by Rev. S. D. F. Salmond in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 6:82). Modern scholars have variously identified the author as Lazarus (Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I–XII*, The Anchor Bible, 29 [Garden City: N.Y: Doubleday, 1966], xciii–xcviii) or Thomas (James H. Charlesworth, *The Beloved Disciple: Whose Witness Validates the Gospel of John?* [Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995]).

76. Nowhere else in John's Gospel do we find Jesus described as the word, although we do find reference to it in 1 John 1:1–2. Robert J. Matthews suggests that, in addition to John 1, John 3:27–36 may also originate with John the Baptist (*A Burning Light: The Life and Ministry of John the Baptist* [Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1972], 79–83).

77. Both Clement of Alexandria (quoted in Eusebius, *Church History*, 6.14.7) and the Muratorian Canon (9–16) indicate that John worked with others in deciding to write his Gospel. For a discussion, see Judd, “Who Really Wrote the Gospels?” 132–34. The story of the adulterous woman in John 8:1–11 is not original to the text. It is not found in the oldest texts of the Gospel and clearly interrupts the flow of the narrative. For a Latter-day Saint analysis of the text, see

Thomas A. Wayment, “The Woman Taken in Adultery and the History of the New Testament Canon,” in *The Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ*, 2:372–97.

78. Eusebius, *Church History*, 6.14.7.

79. John’s emphasis that the “word was made flesh” was in response to a group of Christians known as Docetists. Their philosophical world view insisted that a perfect god could not have an imperfect body of flesh. Their name comes from the Greek word, *dokeō*, which means “to seem” or “to appear.” They taught that Christ only “seemed” to come to earth in a fleshly tabernacle—hence John’s insistence that the Word became flesh. This may also be the reason that he included the doubting Thomas pericope in John 20:24–29.

80. Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, “The Passion of Jesus Christ,” in *The Lord of the Gospels*, ed. Bruce A. Van Orden and Brent L. Top (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1991),