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Detailed Study

2.1.1 The gospels

One point at the beginning is important to lay on the table. In the pages of the New Testament one finds the gospel, but not the gospel(s). The Greek word that is translated “gospel” by most English translations is τὸ εὐαγγέλιον (to euangelion). Inside the New Testament, the word refers to the message of salvation preached by early Christians that centered on the redemption achieved by the death and resurrection of Christ. Not until the second Christian century does the word take on the additional meaning of a certain kind of Christian writing that tells the story of Jesus in written form.

2.1.1.1 External History.

Methodology: How does one determine who wrote each gospel? The compositional history of each of the gospels depends upon the interpretation of sets of data that lie both inside each document as well as outside it. One must closely examine both sets of information and evaluate the reliability of each. The data inside each document is largely determined by applying methods of literary criticism to each gospel. Items such as narrative perspective, spatial focus, writing strategy, use of the Greek language etc. are thoroughly examined in order to create a “writer profile.” The data outside each document is primarily a thorough examination of early church traditions regarding the compositional history. One has to wade through varying perspectives, sift through traditions to try to distinguish between legend and fact, etc.

Then make a comparison of both sets in order to determine common elements that mesh well with one another. Those common elements that create tension become the challenge in drawing conclusions about answers to the “reporter” questions of **who, when, where, to whom** and **why**. Usually, one begins with the assumption of the early church traditions about authorship, and sees whether or not the “writer profile” generated from data inside the gospel will fit the early tradition. If so, then a high degree of certainty about the accuracy of those traditions can be concluded. When the two sets of data hardly match up, then one has to seriously question the accuracy of the church tradition. And also, one must seek to postulate an alternative compositional history. The somewhat technical procedure to doing all this analysis is known as Historical Criticism. In the study of the Bible the common label for this is Biblical Criticism.

Additionally, with the four canonical gospels one must probe the literary relationship among these four writings, since with the first three so much common material exists, along with a common over arching structure in presenting the story of Jesus. This will leave to last the issue of how the Gospel of John relates to the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke). The procedure for evaluating these matters is known as Source Criticism. In New Testament application to the gospels, it grows out of the Synoptic Problem, i.e., how the four gospels, and in particular the first three, are connected to one another.

But wait a minute! Do we really need to do all this? Doesn't each gospel document have a title that says

“The Gospel according to”? True, this title is at the beginning of each gospel. But -- and it’s a big one -- that title wasn’t in the original document. It was added decades after the writing of each gospel account. It is the starting point for identifying the dominate church tradition about the authorship of each gospel. Also, helpful to determining the early church traditions is a postscript inserted at the end of each NT document in some of the later Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. Up until the middle of the twentieth century an English translation of these was included in the King James Version, but they are rarely included even in the KJV editions today. The remain available in some printed Greek text critical apparatuses. Typically, these indicate the assumed location and time of writing, as well as the supposed author. Although of no real use for critical investigation, they do provide a quick thumbnail sketch of the dominant church tradition regarding the external history.

2.1.1.2 Internal History.

Definitions. The label “Internal History” can be understood to mean several different things, some of which overlap one another. As I will use the term here, it will refer to the history described by the text itself. This sense, rather than the history about the origin of the document in which the text is found, i.e., External History. With the gospel accounts, this will focus on what Jesus said and did. Some methodological implications grow out of this.

Methodology. *First*, the Bible student needs to trace down and identify each action and each saying of Jesus as recorded by each of the gospel writers. In part this involves determining natural literary units of material that can comprise what is commonly referred to as a “pericope.” The technical method central to this is called Form Criticism, coming from its German origins known as Formgeschichte. For a listing of these pericopes for each gospel that I developed years ago, see “The List of X’s Gospel” in the New Testament Study Aids at Cranfordville.com. Once this task has been completed, *then* a careful examination of how each gospel writer uses these “building locks” to put his distinct story of Jesus together is necessary. The result is a “gospel” account of Jesus, rather than a biography of Jesus. The importance of this literary form is to remind us that each story of Jesus has the motivation of encouraging faith in Jesus as the means of salvation, as both Luke 1:1-4 and John 20:31 stress. The technical method of analysis here is called Redaction Criticism, from its German beginnings, Redaktionskritik. *Next*, a careful comparison of how each of the four gospel writers tell their stories of Jesus is necessary. Now we’re dealing with Source Criticism, otherwise known in German as Literarkritik. With the first three gospels, this turns into a quest to understand how these gospel accounts are connected to each other literarily. The necessity of such an analysis comes from the reality that *“91% of Mark’s content is found in Matthew, and 53% of Mark is found in Luke.”*

This quest is called “the Synoptic Problem.” Two general viewpoints dominate current thinking: 1) **The Two Source Hypothesis** -- the view that Matthew and Luke use a copy of Mark along with another source called Q (from German word Quelle meaning source). The Markan source is easy to detect; the stories of Matthew and Luke that are found in Mark. The Q source surfaces where the same stories surface common to Matthew and Luke but are not found in Mark. Variations of this viewpoint will be found among New Testament scholars over the past two centuries. 2) **The Two Gospel Hypothesis** -- the view that Matthew is the first gospel to be written. Luke had access to it when writing his gospel. Then Mark had both Matthew and Luke in hand, and he chose to write a scaled down version of these two sources. The following chart illustrates the approaches.



One major objective of such an analysis for the past several centuries has been to understand the “Historical Jesus.” Because of the impact of modern ideas of history with a concern to establish a “factual” understanding of the past, many biblical scholars since the 1700s have felt compelled to establish a historical basis for the life of Jesus using accepted standards for writing “modern scientific history.” In fact, this pressure is what drove the development of Historical Criticism beginning in the 1700s in biblical studies. Add to this the development of modern biography as an important part of western literature. The interest to write a “biography” of Jesus based solely on “factual” history became intense by the middle 1800s. Another impetus in this mixture was the tendency of the “official church” to be so wedded to the existing governmental authorities that Christianity became an extension of governmental policies, even when the government was a dictatorship imposing enormous injustices on its citizens. The biography of Jesus movement provided a way to distance

the Jesus of the gospels from the official church dogma about Him. Usually the “historical Jesus” was much more sympathetic to the cries of injustice from European peasants and working class people. As such, this Jesus served as a counterbalance against exploding atheism through the teachings of Karl Marx and others in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

To be sure, such a goal -- to produce a pure biography of a historical Jesus -- has severe limits and dangers. It must ignore the genuinely religious and spiritual side of the stories of Jesus in the four gospels. Modern scientific methodology cannot address the issue of the gospels as “sacred scripture” and the divine inspiration aspect. Methodologically, this lies beyond its purview. Consequently, the gospels must be analyzed as purely human products in this approach. Immediately issues such as Jesus’ miracles and His resurrection become serious barriers that usually get tossed aside because the method of analysis can’t deal with them historically. Modern history is an accounting of pure human activity; the divine lies beyond its scope of concern.

Yet, for serious Bible students coming to the gospels wanting to learn about Jesus both historically and spiritually, insights from the study based on this methodology can be gleaned, although they are limited. One must “know what is going on” in each assessment. As Dr. Conner used to say at SWBTS in Fort Worth, “an old cow grazing in the pasture has enough sense to graze around the cockleburs. Surely, we’ve got enough sense to do the same when reading the views of scholars.” For my perspective on a life of Christ with historical emphasis see my [Life of Christ: Summary Listing](#) at Cranfordville. Hyperlinks inside this page exist at each stage taking you into a much more detailed listing, and then a third level contains summary commentary on most of these segments. Redaction Criticism has moved scholarship more toward understanding the religious portrait of Jesus painted by each gospel writer. Thus many work on grasping the “theology of Matthew etc.” using a more productive methodology.

2.1.1.3 The Gospel of Mark.

Although some scholars disagree, the majority will take the position that the Gospel of Mark was the first of the four gospels to be written. It is the shortest of the four gospels in length. Regarding the Compositional History, the earliest church tradition relates to a comment made by Papias at the close of the first Christian century. We don’t have his original writings or even a copy of them, but he is quoted by the later church historian Eusebius that Mark recorded the thoughts of the apostle Peter regarding the ministry of Jesus.

2.1.1.3.1 Compositional History

Robert Grant (see below) provides this summary of the church tradition regarding Mark:

The idea that Mark wrote a gospel is attested by Papias, early in the second century; he says that Mark never encountered Jesus but later became the disciple and ‘interpreter’ of Peter. On the basis of Peter’s teaching about the words and deeds of Jesus, he drew up an account which was accurate but not ‘in order’ (Eusebius, H.E. 3, 39, 15). Papias seems to be contrasting Mark’s work with a gospel ‘in order’ and apostolic; probably he has John in mind. A view like that of Papias is expressed by Justin, about 150; he refers to a passage in Mark’s gospel as derived from Peter. The Petrine origin of Mark is also attested by Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria, though Clement adds the statement that Peter neither commended nor disapproved of Mark’s work.

Clement’s caution may be due to the fact that in the second century Gnostics were especially fond of the gospel. The Carpocratians liked it because of its emphasis on secret teaching; followers of Basilides apparently used it to show that Simon of Cyrene, not Jesus, was crucified (reading Mark 15:21-4 with severe literalism). According to a letter of Clement discovered by Morton Smith, the Carpocratians had their own version of the gospel, while the church of Alexandria used not only the ordinary version but also an esoteric document based upon it.

From a developing of an internal author profile, few items will create tension with the profile from early church tradition. Although not all stand in agreement here, I see little reason to abandon the church tradition regarding the origin of the Markan gospel.

2.1.1.3.2 Internal Contents

The arrangement of Mark’s story about Jesus provide a focus on Jesus’ ministry in Galilee and on the final week of Jesus’ life in Jerusalem leading up to the crucifixion. Everything else seems almost to be a footnote to those two central emphases. For a listing of the passages (= pericopes) in the gospel see my [Gospel of Mark: List of Pericopes](#) at cranfordville.com. How this fits into a historical approach to Jesus life and ministry can be seen at the Life of Christ page at Cranfordville.com. A helpful summary of the contents is provided by J. MacRory in the Catholic Encyclopedia article (see below):

The Second Gospel, like the other two Synoptics, deals chiefly with the Galilean ministry of Christ, and the events of the last week at Jerusalem. In a brief introduction, the ministry of the Precursor and the immediate prepa-

ration of Christ for His official work by His Baptism and temptation are touched upon (i, 1-13); then follows the body of the Gospel, dealing with the public ministry, Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus (i, 14-xvi, 8); and lastly the work in its present form gives a summary account of some appearances of the risen Lord, and ends with a reference to the Ascension and the universal preaching of the Gospel (xvi, 9-20). The body of the Gospel falls naturally into three divisions: the ministry in Galilee and adjoining districts: Phoenicia, Decapolis, and the country north towards Cæarea Philippi (i, 14-ix, 49); the ministry in Judea and (kai peran, with B, Aleph, C*, L, Psi, in x, 1) Peræ, and the journey to Jerusalem (x, 1-xi, 10); the events of the last week at Jerusalem (xi, 11-xvi, 8).

Beginning with the public ministry (cf. Acts 1:22; 10:37), St. Mark passes in silence over the preliminary events recorded by the other Synoptists: the conception and birth of the Baptist, the genealogy, conception, and birth of Jesus, the coming of the Magi, etc. He is much more concerned with Christ's acts than with His discourses, only two of these being given at any considerable length (iv, 3-32; xiii, 5-37). The miracles are narrated most graphically and thrown into great prominence, almost a fourth of the entire Gospel (in the Vulg., 164 verses out of 677) being devoted to them, and there seems to be a desire to impress the readers from the outset with Christ's almighty power and dominion over all nature. The very first chapter records three miracles: the casting out of an unclean spirit, the cure of Peter's mother-in-law, and the healing of a leper, besides alluding summarily to many others (i, 32-34); and, of the eighteen miracles recorded altogether in the Gospel, all but three (ix, 16-28; x, 46-52; xi, 12-14) occur in the first eight chapters. Only two of these miracles (vii, 31-37; viii, 22-26) are peculiar to Mark, but, in regard to nearly all, there are graphic touches and minute details not found in the other Synoptics. Of the parables proper Mark has only four: the sower (iv, 3-9), the seed growing secretly (iv, 26-29), the mustard seed (iv, 30-32), and the wicked husbandman (xii, 1-9); the second of these is wanting in the other Gospels. Special attention is paid throughout to the human feelings and emotions of Christ, and to the effect produced by His miracles upon the crowd. The weaknesses of the Apostles are far more apparent than in the parallel narratives of Matt. and Luke, this being, probably due to the graphic and candid discourses of Peter, upon which tradition represents Mark as relying.

The repeated notes of time and place (e.g., i, 14, 19, 20, 21, 29, 32, 35) seem to show that the Evangelist meant to arrange in chronological order at least a number of the events which he records. Occasionally the note of time is wanting (e.g. i, 40; iii, 1; iv, 1; x, 1, 2, 13) or vague (e.g. ii, 1, 23; iv, 35), and in such cases he may of course depart from the order of events. But the very fact that in some instances he speaks thus vaguely and indefinitely makes it all the more necessary to take his definite notes of time and sequence in other cases as indicating chronological order. We are here confronted, however, with the testimony of Papias, who quotes an elder (presbyter), with whom he apparently agrees, as saying that Mark did not write in order: "And the elder said this also: Mark, having become interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately everything that he remembered, without, however, recording in order what was either said or done by Christ. For neither did he hear the Lord, nor did he follow Him, but afterwards, as I said, (he attended) Peter, who adapted his instructions to the needs (of his hearers), but had no design of giving a connected account of the Lord's oracles [v. l. "words"]. So then Mark made no mistake [Schmiedel, "committed no fault"], while he thus wrote down some things (enia as he remembered them; for he made it his one care not to omit anything that he had heard, or set down any false statement therein" (Euseb., "Hist. Eccl.", III, xxxix). Some indeed have understood this famous passage to mean merely that Mark did not write a literary work, but simply a string of notes connected in the simplest fashion (cf. Swete, "The Gospel acc. to Mark", pp. lx-lxi). The present writer, however, is convinced that what Papias and the elder deny to our Gospel is chronological order, since for no other order would it have been necessary that Mark should have heard or followed Christ. But the passage need not be understood to mean more than that Mark occasionally departs from chronological order, a thing we are quite prepared to admit. What Papias and the elder considered to be the true order we cannot say; they can hardly have fancied it to be represented in the First Gospel, which so evidently groups (e.g. viii-ix), nor, it would seem, in the Third, since Luke, like Mark, had not been a disciple of Christ. It may well be that, belonging as they did to Asia Minor, they had the Gospel of St. John and its chronology in mind. At any rate, their judgment upon the Second Gospel, even if be just, does not prevent us from holding that Mark, to some extent, arranges the events of Christ's like in chronological order.

One of the stylistic tendencies of the Markan gospel is its extensive use of action oriented verbs, along with temporal adverbs signaling quick movement of time. In fact, the use of these adverbs is so extensive that it's difficult to conclude that they always have cognitive meaning. An important implication of this literary strategy is that the gospel paints a picture of Jesus as a decisive leader who knew exactly what he wanted to do, and did it. Jesus quickly moved from one event to the next, ever in control and always with deliberateness. Very likely Mark is intentionally painting Jesus along the lines of the traditional Roman "bios" (ancient biography form). In Roman culture, a great leader had to be a decisive person who "took charge" of every situation. He needed to know what he was doing and be able to handle every situation that was thrown at him. In Mark's portrait of Jesus, we find such a person as the founder of the Christian movement. Very possibly this points us toward Mark's target audience of Romans who could accept Jesus better if he "fit the mold" of Roman thinking about qualities of greatness. Additionally, narrative critical analysis has suggested that Mark's gospel points toward a narrational initial readership, who lived either in Galilee or north of there in the Roman province of Syria. This stands in contrast to the early church tradition which believed the gospel was written in Roman fairly soon after the martyrdom of the apostle Peter there in the mid 60s.

For a helpful treatment of the themes and theological slant of the Gospel of Mark, see the article in the *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* on the *Theology of Mark*. This will represent a very conservative assessment of the contents of the gospel, but the author, Herbert L. Swartz, has given a solid summary of the contents with the theological themes present in the material.

How do I learn more about the Gospel of Mark?

Online sources

Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gospel_of_Mark

Encyclopedia Britannica (1911 ed): http://www.1911encyclopedia.org/Gospel_Of_St_Mark

Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology, "Mark, Theology of":
<http://bible.crosswalk.com/Dictionaries/BakersEvangelicalDictionary/bed.cgi?number=T463>

New Testament Gateway, "The Gospel of Mark": <http://ntgateway.com/mark/>

This link is what is known as a "gateway" leading to numerous URLs dealing with the gospel of Mark. One needs to exercise caution about these kinds of links, since the secondary URLs will typically contain a wide variety of materials of differing quality.

Religion online, "The Gospel of Mark": <http://www.textweek.com/mkjnacts/mark.htm>

Another gateway page with even more URLs treating the Gospel of Mark, and greater diversity of both viewpoint and quality of content.

Catholic Encyclopedia, "The Gospel of Mark": <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09674b.htm>

Robert M. Grant, *A Historical Introduction to the New Testament*, "The Gospel of Mark," chap. 8:
<http://www.religion-online.org/showchapter.asp?title=1116&C=1228>

Print Sources

Annotated Bibliography at cranfordville.com: <http://cranfordville.com/NT-BiblioCom.html>

Located in the Bibliography section of cranfordville.com is a growing number of references to hard copy treatments on the Gospel of Mark. This includes both commentaries and articles.

2.1.1.4 The Gospel of Matthew.

The Gospel of Matthew shows up first in the list of documents in the New Testament. A couple of reasons, among others, most likely lay behind this. For one thing, the gospel has a powerful Jewish Christian tone and devotes considerable effort to linking Jesus to the Old Testament scriptures as the fulfillment of Messianic prophecy in the Prophets section of the Hebrew Bible. Logically, then, it serves something as a "paper clip" linking the two testaments of the Christian Bible together. The other probable reason is that most of the church fathers considered Matthew to have been the first gospel to come into written form. Although most contemporary scholars are not so persuaded, this was a commonly held viewpoint for the first several centuries of the Christian era.

2.1.1.4.1 Compositional History

Deciding upon the issue of authorship of the first gospel has provoked considerable difficulty and subsequently a wide diversity of viewpoint in the modern era.

2.1.1.4.1.1 External History

Early church viewpoint about the authorship of the first gospel was strongly oriented toward Matthew, a tax collector also named Levi, who became one of the twelve apostles. This means that Matthew moved from the fringe of religious life as a Jew to a devout commitment as a Christian. As a tax collector he had constant contact with Gentiles and also worked with the Romans in taxing the Jewish people. Given the notorious corruption of the tax system at that time, Matthew was engaging in a career that prevented him from being a seriously religious Jewish male worshiping in the temple etc. As a follower of Jesus, however, he moved to a very passionately committed disciple of Jesus. This is the general picture of Matthew emerging from both church tradition and the few references to him inside the gospels of the New Testament. Thus the label "The Gospel according to Matthew" came to be attached to this document some years after its composition reflect-

ing this church father viewpoint.

2.1.1.4.1.2 Internal History

Robert M. Grant provides a summary of the internal profile of the author using literary critical methods of analysis:

Matthew contains a total of 18,300 words and uses a vocabulary of 1,690 words; he is the only New Testament writer to use 112 of these (of which seventy-six occur in the Septuagint). Among his favourite expressions are these: mention of God as 'Father' forty-five times (compared with five in Mark, seventeen in Luke) -- including 'our Father', 'your Father', 'the Father in the heavens', 'the heavenly Father' -- and of the kingdom as 'the kingdom of the heavens' 'fulfil' (in regard to prophecy), 'righteousness, hypocrite' 'weeping and gnashing of teeth'. In addition, there are some words which are less significant theologically but equally characteristic of his vocabulary: verbs of motion such as 'withdraw' ('anachorein') and 'come to' or ('approach'), ('proserchesthai'), and favourite connectives like 'then' ('tote', ninety times), 'thence' ('ekeithen'), and 'just as' ('hosper').

Less significant, but rather striking, is his repetition of 'formulas' such as 'from then he began' (4:17, 16:21), 'do not suppose that I came' (5:17, 10:34), 'sons of the kingdom' (8:12, 13:38), 'to outer darkness' (8:12, 22:13, 25:30), 'the lost sheep of the house of Israel' (10:6, 15:24). Special notice should be given to the formula, 'He who has ears, let him hear' (11:15, 13:9, 43) and the summaries of Jesus' healings (4:23-4, 8:16, 9:35, 14:35) Matthew also likes to end sections of teaching with the expression, 'And it happened when Jesus finished' (these words, or equivalent) ; it occurs five times (7:28, 11:1, 13:53, 19:1, 26:1), perhaps as a reflection of the five books of Moses.

He arranges his materials rather systematically; thus his gospel begins with a listing of the fourteen generations from Abraham to David, the fourteen generations from David to the Babylonian captivity, and the fourteen generations from the Babylonian captivity to Jesus Christ (1:1-17). The sayings of Jesus are often arranged in groups of threes, fives and sevens.

It is thus all the more surprising when we find more than a dozen sayings of Jesus given twice, as well as four sections of narrative. Since almost all of the sayings are paralleled once in Mark (usually in the same context as in Mark), the most likely explanation is that when Matthew found them not only in Mark but also in some other source -- perhaps oral tradition -- he used them twice. It is possible that he had already written something like a gospel (Papias's 'compilation of dominical oracles'?) and then revised it completely by incorporating Mark in it.

The theory of Augustine that Mark is nothing but an abbreviation of Matthew is untenable because where the two gospels are parallel the style of Matthew is almost always superior to that of Mark. It is reasonable to suppose that Matthew improved upon Mark's style, not that Mark perverted Matthew's.

It has been claimed that the gospel cannot have been written by an apostle because of its use of Mark; an apostle cannot have relied upon a book written by one who was not an apostle. This claim does not seem very convincing. We cannot tell whether or not an apostle would have followed such a procedure. An apostle might have believed that Mark's outline was largely correct but needed some revision and some supplementation. An apostle who proclaimed the gospel among Jews might have believed that Jewish Christianity, though ultimately only a part of Catholic Christianity, deserved more adequate representation than it found in Mark. But to say what he might or might not have thought is no substitute for examining the gospel itself.

The author of this gospel presents his portrait of Jesus in a manner not unlike that used by the rabbis. He is deeply concerned with the fulfillment of prophecy; indeed, most of what Jesus did he regards as taking place 'that the scripture might be fulfilled'. Thus the virginal conception was foretold in Isaiah 7:14, the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem in Micah 5:2, the 'massacre of the innocents' in Jeremiah 31:15, and Jesus' absence in Egypt in Hosea 11:1. Other events in the life of Jesus are given prophetic antecedents in the same way.

This author profile from within the document has difficulty matching the profile of Matthew derived from early church tradition. For me, a particularly troublesome point is how a Jewish tax collector relegated to the fringe of first century Jewish religious life could write a gospel using some of the most skilled patterns of argumentation that only the finest Jewish rabbis of that day knew how to use. This poses a large barrier against accepting the early church view of authorship, because no plausible explanation to explain this discontinuity has surfaced thus far. For me, a settled conclusion on the authorship of the first gospel remains in suspension, since no other individual of that time surfaces as a viable possibility.

A common Redactional scenario sees the Matthean gospel produced in the 70s in either Damascus or Antioch by the Matthean "school" -- disciple followers of Matthew -- in order to strengthen Jewish Christians in that region against the growing Jewish nationalism following the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 70 AD. Judaism struggled, at times in desperation, in the decades after the Roman destruction of Jerusalem to find ways of surviving. Much pressure was placed on so-called "splinter groups" of Jews to adopt a rigid view of the "traditions of the fathers" as a survival tactic. Christian Jews were among those pushed to abandon their "heretical" beliefs and "come back home" to the synagogue as a matter of national pride. The Matthean Gospel was a community product urging Jewish Christians to realize that Jesus was no aberration from the Old Testament. To the contrary, he stood as the fulfillment and continuation of what God had promised the Jewish people in the Old Testament. Thus to be a Christian was indeed to be plugged into where

every faithful Jew should be.

2.1.1.4.2 Internal Contents

One of the things that distinguishes Matthew from Mark is the starting point of the gospel. Only Matthew and Luke contain the “Christmas stories” about Jesus’ birth and isolated events in his childhood. As the above chart indicates, Matthew begins with the announcement to Joseph and Mary about the supernatural conception and birth of Jesus. But both gospel writers only touch on events of the first few years of Jesus’ life and then jump to the beginning of public ministry when Jesus was thirty years old (cf. Luke 3:23), the age when Jewish young men were considered to be adults. So the later childhood and youth of Jesus are skipped over by both gospel writers. Luke states explicitly that his growing up was normal in every way (Lk. 2:52): “**And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.**” Thus nothing in these years contributes to the theological portrait of Jesus that the gospel writers are painting with their gospel accounts.

The arrangement of material in the Matthean gospel has been analyzed different ways. One common literary approach, that has powerful arguments in its favor, is to see the material largely divided between narrative and speech segments. Five speech sections that mimic the “five books of Moses” -- a very popular approach from the grouping of the Psalms onward in Jewish circles -- provide anchor points. Narrative material fills in the gaps between these speech sections as is reflected in the following outline:

The Prologue Matt. 1-2

Book One: The Son begins to proclaim the Kingdom Matt. 3:1-7:29

Narrative: Beginnings of the ministry Matt. 3:1-4:25

Discourse: The Sermon on the Mount Matt. 5:1-7:29

Book Two: The mission of Jesus and his disciples in Galilee Matt. 8:1-11:1

Narrative: The cycle of nine miracle stories Matt. 8:1-9:38

Discourse: The mission, past and future Matt.10:1-11:1

Book Three: Jesus meets opposition from Israel Matt. 11:2-13:53

Narrative: Jesus disputes with Israel and condemns it Matt. 11:2-12:50

Discourse: Jesus withdraws from Israel into parabolic speech Matt. 13:1-53

Book Four: The Messiah forms his church and prophesies his passion Matt. 13:54-18:35

Narrative: The itinerant Jesus prepares for the church by his deeds Matt. 13:54-17:27

Discourse: Church life and order Matt. 18:1-35

Book Five: The Messiah and his church on the way to the passion Matt. 19:1-25:46

Narrative: Jesus leads his disciples to the cross as he confounds his enemies. Matt. 19:1-23:29

Discourse: The Last Judgment Matt. 24-25

The Climax: Death-Resurrection Matt. 26-28

From Wednesday to Thursday night Matt. 26:1-75

From Friday morning to Saturday Matt. 27:1-66

From Sunday to the End of the Age Matt. 28:1-20

Again from a historical standpoint, Matthew closely follows Mark from the beginning of the Galilean ministry forward. The major exception is that Matthew has Jesus talking a lot more than does Mark. In any case, one of the distinctive themes is the very strong emphasis upon Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.

How do I learn more about the Gospel of Matthew?

Online:

Scot McKnight, Baker’s Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology, “Matthew, Theology of”:
<http://bible.crosswalk.com/Dictionaries/BakersEvangelicalDictionary/bed.cgi?number=T466>

Wikipedia, “The Gospel of Matthew”:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gospel_of_Matthew

Encyclopedia Britannica (1911 ed), “The Gospel of St Matthew” :
http://www.1911encyclopedia.org:8000/Gospel_Of_St_Matthew

New Testament Gateway, "The Gospel of Matthew":

<http://ntgateway.com/matthew/>

This link is what is known as a "gateway" leading to numerous URLs dealing with the gospel of Matthew. One needs to exercise caution about these kinds of links, since the secondary URLs will typically contain a wide variety of materials of differing quality.

Religion online, "The Gospel of Matthew":

<http://www.textweek.com/mtlk/matthew.htm>

Another gateway page with even more URLs treating the Gospel of Matthew, and greater diversity of both viewpoint and quality of content.

Catholic Encyclopedia, "The Gospel of Matthew":

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10057a.htm>

Robert M. Grant, A Historical Introduction to the New Testament, "The Gospel of Matthew," chap. 9:

<http://www.religion-online.org/showchapter.asp?title=1116&C=1229>

Print Sources

Annotated Bibliography at cranfordville.com:

<http://cranfordville.com/NT-BiblioCom.html>

Located in the Bibliography section of cranfordville.com is a growing number of references to hard copy treatments on the Gospel of Matthew. This includes both commentaries and articles.

2.1.1.5 The Gospel of Luke.

The third gospel of the four is the longest of all and contains unquestionably the highest level writing skills in the lingua franca of that day, Koine Greek. The author of this document was very skilled in his Greek language abilities, and also reflects a deep knowledge of the Greek language style of writing found in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament. As is the case with the other gospels, this document does not name its author. The title, "The Gospel according to Luke," reflects a widespread early church tradition about authorship.

This gospel document is linked to the book of Acts through the Prologues of each:

Luke 1:1-4	Acts 1:1-5
1 Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, 2 just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, 3 I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, 4 so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.	1 In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning 2 until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. 3 After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. 4 While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. "This," he said, "is what you have heard from me; 5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

The first words of Acts 1:1 make it clear that the gospel was written first. The author intentionally links Acts back to the gospel with his depiction of the final scenes of the gospel in Lk. 24. The two volume "set" then attempts to tell the story of Jesus, followed by the first three decades of the Christian community of faith that Jesus left behind. In that sequel, Peter and Paul are the two central figures described from about 30 to 60 AD. Whether Luke intended to add a third volume to this set is debated among scholars. We will address that question in our overview of the book of Acts.

Quite popular for the last half century is the view that Luke intended to write a Heilsgeschichtliche Historie (Salvation History) that focused on three eras of God's redemptive activity: 1) The Old Testament is the story of God's activity with the covenant people of Israel; 2) the gospel is the transition of that salvation history to the redemptive accomplishment in Jesus, the new covenant, with John the Baptist as the transitional figure from the old to the new; 3) the book of Acts is the climax of that salvation history that shares how the new covenant community began sharing the witness of salvation to the entire world. Professor Hans Conzelmann first set forth this proposal in the 1950s with his study of Luke-Acts titled *In der Mitte der Zeit*, and later translated into English as *The Theology of St. Luke*. For a thorough evaluation of Conzelmann's proposal see W.

C. Robinson, Jr., "Luke, Gospel of," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Supplementary volume.

We can confidently conclude that we have a common author between these two documents in the New Testament. Should they be studied jointly, or should they be studied separately? New Testament scholarship is divided on that question. In the bibliography listed below, you will find studies taking one or the other approach.

2.1.1.5.1 Compositional History

The article in Wikipedia on Luke does a pretty good job of summarizing the early church tradition about this gospel's author:

Nowhere in Luke or Acts does it explicitly say that the author is Luke, the companion of Paul. The earliest surviving witnesses that place Luke as the author are the Muratorian Canon (c. 170), the writings of Irenaeus (c. 180), and the Anti-Marcionite Prologue (second half of the 2nd century). [1][2] According to the Catholic Encyclopedia, the evidence in favor of Lucan authorship is based on two main things: first, the use of "we" in Acts chapters 16, 20, 21 and 27 suggests the writer traveled with Paul; second, in the opinion of the Roman Catholic writers of the encyclopedia, the "medical language" employed by the writer is "identical with those employed by such medical writers as Hippocrates, Arctæus, Galen, and Dioscorides". [3] According to this view, Paul's "dear friend Luke the Doctor" (Col 4:14) and "fellow worker" (Phm 24) makes the most likely candidate for authorship out of all the companions mentioned in Paul's writings.

Modern scholarship does not unanimously agree on these points, stating that the author of Luke was anonymous. A number of theories exist regarding the first person ("we") passages. According to V. K. Robbins, the first person narration was a generic style for sea voyages. Robbins goes on to discuss why the book of Acts also uses first person narration on land and why it is absent from many other sea passages. It is also possible a first person travel diary could have been incorporated into Acts from an earlier source or the author could simply have been untruthful about being a companion of Paul. Additionally, the thesis that the vocabulary is special to a physician was questioned by H. J. Cadbury in his dissertation *The Style and Literary Method of Luke*, which argued that some of the vocabulary is found in non medical works as well.

The evangelist does not claim to have been an eyewitness of Jesus' life, but to have "investigated everything carefully" and "writ[ten] an orderly account" "of the events... just as they were handed on... by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses" (Luke 1:1-4). According to the two-source hypothesis, the most commonly accepted solution to the synoptic problem, Luke's sources included the Gospel of Mark and another collection of lost sayings known as Q, the Quelle or "source" document. The more traditional theory, advocating Matthew as the earliest Gospel, which the two-source hypothesis usurped as favourite, is known as the Augustinian hypothesis.

The general consensus is that Luke was written by a Greek for gentile Christians. The Gospel is addressed to the author's patron, the most excellent Theophilus, which in Greek simply means Friend of God, and may not be a name, but a generic term for a Christian. The Gospel is clearly directed at Christians, or at those who already knew about Christianity, rather than a general audience, since the ascription goes on to state that the Gospel was written "...so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught" (Luke 1:3-4).

The early church is very united in its designation of Luke the physician, mentioned in Col. 4:4 and Phm. 24, as the source of both Luke and Acts. To be sure, various explanations can be given for the "we" sections in Acts and their relationship to the question of author. But still very common is the older view that these sections reflect the writer of Acts joining the missionary group as it came into Macedonia on the secondary missionary journey. At this point the writer of Acts essentially shifts from telling his story from a "they did this; they did that" to a "we did this; we did that" perspective. As a physician Luke would have been a slave, since the vast majority of lawyers and doctors in that Roman world were slaves. One should remember that many slaves in the first century Roman world were among the most highly educated of that time. Every large estate needed highly educated slaves to take care of the health of the family and legal experts to interpret legal matters in the Roman court system. Very possibly Theophilus could have been Luke's owner who loaned him out to Paul because of Paul's ongoing health issues mentioned a few times in the letters of Paul. The understanding is that Luke then remained with the apostle until his martyrdom in Rome in the mid 60s. Sometime after that Luke completed the writing of these two documents after collecting data during his travels with the apostle for over a decade.

When one looks at the author profile compiled from inside the gospel the main features do not seriously dispute the early church tradition. Quite clearly there is a "universal" perspective in which Jesus is stressed as the Savior for all the world, rather than just for the Jewish people. This is not to suggest that the other gospels do not present Jesus as a universal Savior, but Luke focuses on this more than the others. Luke greatly emphasizes Jesus ministry to the lowly and outcasts of society, which is in line with what one would expect if a slave were doing the writing. For me, a much higher confidence in the early church tradition about authorship can be given here than for the first gospel.

2.1.1.5.2 Internal Contents

Vincent Taylor (*Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible*, iPreach) provides a helpful summary of the con-

tents:

4. Distinctive characteristics. **a. Universalism.** This quality has already been noted in the account of the sermon at Nazareth, in the references to the widow at Zarephath and Naaman the Syrian (4:25-27). It runs throughout the gospel -- in the birth stories, where the promised salvation is described as a "light for revelation to the Gentiles" (2:32); in the parable of the great supper, in which the servant is bidden to "go out to the highways and hedges, and compel people to come in" (14:23); and in the story of the appearance to the Eleven according to which the disciples are to preach repentance and the forgiveness of sins "to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem" (24:47).

b. An interest in social relationships. This concern appears in the beatitudes addressed to the poor and woes addressed to the rich (6:20-26). Illustrations from finance are frequent -- e.g., in many of the parables, such as the two debtors, the rich fool, the tower builder, the rich man and Lazarus, and the pounds. There are also several references to almsgiving (11:41; 12:33), and frequent allusions to lodging and entertainment (2:7; 9:12; 21:37; also 7:36 ff; 10:38 ff; 13:26; etc.).

c. A deep concern for outcasts, sinners, and Samaritans. See 5:1-11; 7:36 ff; 9:51-55; 10:29-37; 17:11-19; 18:9-14; 19:1-10; 23:39-43. The remark of Harnack has often been quoted: "He has a boundless -- indeed a paradoxical -- love for sinners, together with the most confident hope of their forgiveness and amendment."

d. An interest in stories about women. This interest is illustrated in portraiture of the Virgin, Elizabeth, Anna, the widow at Nain, the penitent harlot, the ministering women from Galilee, Martha and Mary, the bent woman, and the women mentioned in the parables of the lost coin and the unjust judge. The same interest, it will be recalled, is manifest in the Acts in the stories about Tabitha, Lydia, Priscilla, and the four daughters of Philip the evangelist.

e. An emphasis on joy, prayer, and the Holy Spirit. The angelic message to the shepherds speaks of "good news of a great joy which will come to all the people" (2:10). Prayer is mentioned in 5:16; 6:12; 11:1; 22:32, 41-42. On the cross Jesus prays: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do," and commends himself to the Father in the words: "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit" (23:46). The Holy Spirit is mentioned in 4:1, 14, and again at 10:21, and the gift of the Spirit to the disciples is promised in the words: "Behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high" (24:49). These same interests are abundantly illustrated in the Acts.

f. An emphasis on the graciousness and severity of the demands of Jesus. The graciousness of the Lukan Jesus is universally recognized. At Nazareth "all spoke well of him, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth" (4:22). Tenderness and compassion shine in the narratives of the woman of the city, Zacchaeus, and the penitent bandit. It is not always immediately recognized, however, that along with this graciousness there is an imperious note in the sayings of Jesus. Without counseling hatred, he demands undivided loyalty to himself in the saying: "If any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple" (14:26); this saying appears in a more challenging form than in the parallel in Matt. 10:37. Complete renunciation is required in the words which follow the parable of the rash king: "So therefore, whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple" (14:33). The saying on salt (14:34-35; cf. Matt. 5:13; Mark 9:50), which closes this group, appears in a form more searching and more absolute than in the parallel versions: "Salt is good; but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is fit neither for the land nor for the dunghill; men throw it away. He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

g. The stress on the lordship of Christ. The sonship of Christ, while fully recognized in Luke (cf. 1:35; 3:22; 4:3, 9; 10:22), is not emphasized to the degree illustrated in the Pauline letters and the Johannine writings. The stress lies, as indeed it does in the case of Paul, upon the lordship of Christ. This is true also of the Acts. In fact, we may say that the Christology of Luke-Acts is that of primitive Christianity. The evangelist uses the title "the Lord" at least eighteen times, and in various combinations nearly fifty times in the Acts. There can be little doubt that it expresses an attitude of marked religious veneration.

h. The interest taken in the Passion. In this respect the gospel resembles Mark, but there is perhaps a greater interest in its tragic aspects. In 9:51 Jesus sets his face to go to Jerusalem. In 12:50, in a saying found only in Luke, Jesus says: "I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how I am constrained until it is accomplished!" (cf. Mark 10:39). In reply to the threats of Herod Antipas, he says: "Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course" (13:32); and, at the Last Supper, he quotes Isa. 53:12 in the words: "I tell you that this scripture must be fulfilled in me, 'And he was reckoned with transgressors'; for what is written about me has its fulfilment" (22:37). The last clause in this passage has even greater point if, with a number of scholars, it is rendered: "For my life draws to its end." In Luke, Christ is the divine Son and Lord who in filial obedience fulfils a ministry of grace which culminates in suffering, death, and resurrection.

Luke makes extensive use of both Mark and Q as sources, but also has a large amount of other materials that are found exclusively in his gospel account -- more material than from Mark and Q. His research was thorough as he indicated in his prologue (Luke 1:1-4). And in that thoroughness we have a marvelous treasure of information about and interpretation of Jesus that is indispensable.

How do I learn more about the Gospel of Luke?

Online:

J. Julius Scott, Jr., Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology, "Luke-Acts, Theology of":
<http://bible.crosswalk.com/Dictionaries/BakersEvangelicalDictionary/bed.cgi?number=T450>

Wikipedia, "The Gospel of Luke":
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gospel_of_Luke

Encyclopedia Britannica (1911 ed), "The Gospel of St Luke" :
http://www.1911encyclopedia.org/Gospel_Of_St_Luke

New Testament Gateway, "The Gospel of Luke and Acts":
<http://ntgateway.com/lukeacts/>

This link is what is known as a "gateway" leading to numerous URLs dealing with the gospel of Luke. One needs to exercise caution about these kinds of links, since the secondary URLs will typically contain a wide variety of materials of differing quality.

Religion online, "The Gospel of Luke":

<http://www.textweek.com/mtlk/luke.htm>

Another gateway page with even more URLs treating the Gospel of Matthew, and greater diversity of both viewpoint and quality of content.

Catholic Encyclopedia, "The Gospel of Luke":

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09420a.htm>

Robert M. Grant, A Historical Introduction to the New Testament, "The Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts," chap. 10:

<http://www.religion-online.org/showchapter.asp?title=1116&C=1230>

Richard Anderson, Gospel of Luke website:

<http://www.geocities.com/gospelofluke/>

A web site devoted to the studies of Luke Acts.

The Luke site:

<http://home.freeuk.net/thelukesite/Luke.htm>

A web site devoted to the studies of Luke Acts, based in the United Kingdom.

Print Sources

Annotated Bibliography at cranfordville.com:

<http://cranfordville.com/NT-BiblioCom.html>

Located in the Bibliography section of cranfordville.com is a growing number of references to hard copy treatments on the Gospel of Luke. This includes both commentaries and articles.

2.1.1.6 The Gospel of John.

The fourth gospel goes its own distinct way in telling the story of Jesus. It hardly follows the same sequence of the synoptic gospels. Matthew, Mark and Luke devote considerable space to Jesus' ministry in Galilee (Mt. 51%; Mk. 53%; Lk. 24%), while John uses only 15% of his gospel to describe that same ministry. The one segment that he stresses along with the synoptic gospel writers is the last week of Jesus' earthly life, which is known as the Passion of Christ. But here John seldom describes the same events that are found in the first three gospels. Even more distinctive is that almost most none of the events or sayings of Jesus found in the synoptics all through Jesus' earthly life show up in John, as a comparison of the pericopes of the four gospels reveals.

Another matter that will play an important role in understanding the origin of the gospel is the traditional linking of the gospel with the three letters by the same name and the book of Revelation. These four documents in the NT have been seen as originating from the same source, and thus are inner connected. Consequently, when the religious belief system of these documents is discussed often the discussion takes place under the label "The Theology of John" or "Johannian Theology." Additionally, authorship issues of each of

these four documents is typically discussed in terms of whether or not the same person is responsible for all four documents. But serious obstacles quickly arise when approaching these documents from a common authorship assumption. Each document must be taken on its own terms. Rev. 1:4 alone identifies John as its author.

2.1.1.6.1 Compositional History

The early church tradition about the origin of the fourth gospel is rather unified about the apostle John, although not as unified as the quote below from highly traditionalist Catholic Encyclopedia presents it:

The evidence given by the early ecclesiastical authors, whose reference to questions of authorship is but incidental, agrees with that of the above mentioned sources [early versions]. St. Dionysius of Alexandria (264-5), it is true, sought for a different author for the Apocalypse, owing to the special difficulties which were being then urged by the Millenarianists in Egypt; but he always took for granted as an undoubted fact that the Apostle John was the author of the Fourth Gospel. Equally clear is the testimony of Origen (d. 254). He knew from the tradition of the Church that John was the last of the Evangelists to compose his Gospel (Eusebius, "Hist. eccl.", VI, xxv, 6), and at least a great portion of his commentary on the Gospel of St. John, in which he everywhere makes clear his conviction of the Apostolic origin of the work has come down to us. Origen's teacher, Clement of Alexandria (d. before 215-6), relates as "the tradition of the old presbyters", that the Apostle John, the last of the Evangelists, "filled with the Holy Ghost, had written a spiritual Gospel" (Eusebius, op. cit., VI, xiv, 7).

Of still greater importance is the testimony of St. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons (d. about 202), linked immediately with the Apostolic Age as he is, through his teacher Polycarp, the disciple of the Apostle John. The native country of Irenaeus (Asia Minor) and the scene of his subsequent ministry (Gaul) render him a witness of the Faith in both the Eastern and the Western Church. He cites in his writings at least one hundred verses from the Fourth Gospel, often with the remark, "as John, the disciple of the Lord, says". In speaking of the composition of the Four Gospels, he says of the last: "Later John, the disciple of the Lord who rested on His breast, also wrote a Gospel, while he was residing at Ephesus in Asia" (Adv. Haer., III, i, n. 2). As here, so also in the other texts it is clear that by "John, the disciple of the Lord," he means none other than the Apostle John.

We find that the same conviction concerning the authorship of the Fourth Gospel is expressed at greater length in the Roman Church, about 170, by the writer of the Muratorian Fragment (lines 9-34). Bishop Theophilus of Antioch in Syria (before 181) also cites the beginning of the Fourth Gospel as the words of John (Ad Autolyicum, II, xxii). Finally, according to the testimony of a Vatican manuscript (Codex Regini Sueci seu Alexandrinus, 14), Bishop Papias of Hierapolis in Phrygia, an immediate disciple of the Apostle John, included in his great exegetical work an account of the composition of the Gospel by St. John during which he had been employed as scribe by the Apostle.

In the PBS broadcast about the Gospel of John some years back, this helpful synopsis from the contents of the gospel is provided regarding a projected Johannine community as the source of the gospel:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God, and through him were all things made." These words of the opening prologue of the fourth gospel provide a clue to the nature of this work: it stands apart from the three synoptic gospels. It has often been called the "spiritual gospel" because of the way that it portrays Jesus.

If Matthew's Jesus resembles Moses and Luke's Jesus resembles a Greek philosopher or a semi-divine hero, John's Jesus resembles the Jewish ideal of heavenly Wisdom. Some Jewish works written several hundred years before John's gospel portrayed Wisdom as God's heavenly consort. This Wisdom, pictured as a beautiful woman, lived with God and participated in creation. Another part of the myth regarding her was that she descended to earth to impart divine knowledge to human beings. But she was rejected and so returned to God.

Another interesting feature of John's gospel is that Jesus speaks in long monologues, rather than pithy statements or parables. He openly proclaims his divinity and insists that the only way to the Father is through him. Motifs of light and darkness are woven throughout the gospel: these are not simply literary motifs, but devices that give clues about the community for which John was written.

It was a community under stress. The gospel itself suggests that its members were in conflict with the followers of John the Baptist and were undergoing a painful separation from Judaism. The group itself was probably undergoing desertion and internal conflict.

Tradition has credited John, the son of Zebedee and an apostle of Jesus, with the authorship of the fourth gospel. Most scholars dispute this notion; some speculate that the work was actually produced by a group of early Christians somewhat isolated from other early Christian communities. Tradition also places its composition in or near Ephesus, although lower Syria or Lebanon are more likely locations. The most likely time for the completion of this gospel is between 90 and 110 CE.

The central theme of this work is ascent/descent. Jesus is presented as one who travels freely between the dual realms of heaven and earth. As Wayne Meeks has written, he is "the Stranger from Heaven." He -- and he alone -- knows the Father; belief in him is the only way to reach the Father, the only way to salvation. The believers of John's community can see into this spiritual and redeeming cosmos; their opponents cannot.

The opponents of Jesus are "the Jews", who cannot or will not recognize who he is. The author of John deliberately creates a story that may be interpreted on two levels. That is, the story that John tells of Jesus' encounter with the Jews consciously parallels the tensions between John's community and its contemporary Jewish opponents. His community is being expelled from the synagogues, because they believe in Jesus as the Messiah; the Jews

in John's gospel simply cannot grasp his true identity. They constantly ask "Where are you from?" and "Where are you going?"

Jesus responds by saying where he is going they cannot go; they think that he intends to travel abroad. "Does he intend to go to the Diaspora among the Greeks and teach the Greeks?" In this gospel, the Jews cannot know because they are from the darkness; Jesus and his followers are from the light: "You are from below, I am from above; you are of this cosmos, I am not of this cosmos." (8:23)

These themes of light and dark, knowing and unknowing, converge in the crucifixion of Jesus. John makes a deliberate pun on the Greek word "to be crucified", which also means "to be lifted up."

As in the other gospels, the end is not the end. John describes the scene of the empty tomb and Jesus' appearance among the disciples. Thomas still doubts that the figure before him is really Jesus. Jesus instructs him to feel the wound at his side, whereupon Thomas is convinced. Jesus, in a telling reference to those who accept him, says: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

Just as Jesus addresses his disciples, the author of John addresses his community. And he offers them reassurance: "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God and that through believing you may have life in his name." (JN 20:30-31).

As Paula Fredriksen has written, "They could thus see themselves as they saw their Savior: alone in the darkness, yet the light of the world."

Comparing these two profiles -- one outside and one inside -- is not all that easy. The comparison suggests the possibility of the apostle John, but doesn't conclusively point that direction. Thus dogmatic conclusions on this issue would be very inappropriate, and probably would say more about the scholarship and knowledge of the person drawing such conclusions than they would say about the evidence itself.

2.1.1.6.2 Internal Contents

When one seeks to understand the contents of the gospel, the first critical point is to realize the role of the Prologue (1:1-18) from a literary view. In this formal announcement of beginnings, the fourth gospel introduces the reader to the key themes, e.g., light/darkness, logos, John the Baptizer etc. that will provide the interpretative filter through which the story of Jesus is told. Event after event, every saying in the remainder of the gospel will be linked in some way to this prologue foundation for the gospel. One cannot understand the very different way John tells his story of Jesus without this background knowledge.

This cosmological vantage point with issues of the divine logos and the rulers of darkness locked in a life and death struggle is reflected in Jesus' constant conflict with the Jewish religious leaders. The often inability of people to understand what He was trying to say to them has its roots in the limitation of darkness on the minds of those seeking to understand cosmic light and infinite wisdom. In many conversations Jesus will seem to "talk above the heads" of the individuals conversing with him. Sometimes a simple question put to him launches him into a long discourse on a deeply profound spiritual topic the rushes past the point of the question raised to begin with. Read carefully the conversation with Nicodemus in chapter three for an illustration.

The emphases in the fourth gospel, notably in the pericopes of the gospel, stress many different topics that are not found in the synoptic gospels. For a charted comparison of this see my detailed Life of Christ at Cranfordville. Very rarely are any of the episodes, that are recorded in any or some of the synoptic gospels, also recorded in the fourth gospel. Differences in sources of information about Jesus probably accounts for some of this. John's gospel seems to draw heavily from first the Book of Signs that lies behind much of 1:19-12:50, and second from the Book of Glory which is behind the material in 13:1-20:31.

Gary M. Burge in the very conservative Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology has a helpful summation of this:

The Structure of the Gospel. The Fourth Gospel is organized into two principle sections and these are framed by a prologue (1:1-18) and an epilogue (21:1-25), each of which were likely added at some later date either by the Gospel's author or one of his followers. The prologue introduces the incarnation of the preexistent Word and poetically sets the stage for all that is to follow: God discloses his Son in the world of darkness; he is popularly rejected; a select group of followers discover life; and even though the darkness tries, it cannot defeat this Son.

The first section is commonly called the Book of Signs (1:19-12:50) in order to describe how Jesus appears within Judaism replacing its institutions (the temple, sacred wells, teachers) and festivals (Passover, Tabernacles). He offers overwhelming messianic gifts that exploit images intrinsic in the Jewish setting in the narrative (wine, wisdom, water, healing, bread, light, life). The final event is the raising of Lazarus — which utterly discloses Jesus' identity — as well as seals his fate. But even though Jesus experiences hostility among the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, still he discovers receptivity in Galilee (2:11; 4:45; 7:1; etc.) and at the end of this section, Greeks from Galilee eagerly line up to follow him (12:20-26).

The second section is called the Book of Glory (13:1-20:31) because now Jesus takes aside his followers, washes their feet at his final Passover meal (13:1-20), and exhaustively explains to them who he is and what will happen (13:31-17:26). But hinted throughout the Gospel is the notion that the impending cross of Christ will be no tragedy,

but a time when his glory will become visible to all (3:13-15; 13:31; 17:1-5). The cross is one more sign given to disclose that Jesus has been sent by the Father and is now returning to him. For John, this cross is voluntary (10:11, 17, 18). Christ is departing, having completed the work he set out to do. But before he goes, he distributes gifts to all among his followers (20:19-29), blessing them one more time.

Most scholars think that the earliest ending of the gospel is in 20:30-31 and that chapter 21 is a later addition no doubt from the same Johannine sources that supplied the original Gospel. If it is secondary, it nevertheless has the ring of historicity and the echo of Johannine language. Jesus makes a resurrection appearance and commissions his followers in anticipation of his permanent absence.

But it is how these two sources are used that give the distinctive tone to the fourth gospel. This is driven mostly by the desire to interpret Jesus in ways that helped him seem relevant and essential to the Christian community in the late first century.

How do I learn more about the Gospel of John?

Online:

J. Julius Scott, Jr., Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology, "John, Theology of":
<http://bible.crosswalk.com/Dictionaries/BakersEvangelicalDictionary/bed.cgi?number=T390>

Wikipedia, "The Gospel of John":
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gospel_of_John

Encyclopedia Britannica (1911 ed), "The Gospel of St John" :
http://www.1911encyclopedia.org/Gospel_Of_St_John

New Testament Gateway, "The Gospel of John":
<http://ntgateway.com/john/>

This link is what is known as a "gateway" leading to numerous URLs dealing with the gospel of Luke. One needs to exercise caution about these kinds of links, since the secondary URLs will typically contain a wide variety of materials of differing quality.

Religion online, "The Gospel of John":
<http://www.textweek.com/mkjnacts/john.htm>

Another gateway page with even more URLs treating the Gospel of Matthew, and greater diversity of both viewpoint and quality of content.

Catholic Encyclopedia, "The Gospel of John":
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08438a.htm>

Robert M. Grant, A Historical Introduction to the New Testament, "The Gospel of John," chap. 11:
<http://www.religion-online.org/showchapter.asp?title=1116&C=1231>

The Fourth Gospel and John's Epistles: Home Page for Research:
<http://www.fourthgospel.com/>

A web site devoted to the studies of the Johannine writings

Prof. Felix Just, S.J., The Johannine Literature Web:
<http://catholic-resources.org/John/>

A web site devoted to the studies of the Johannine writings. Very helpful and extensive source.

Print Sources

Annotated Bibliography at cranfordville.com:
<http://cranfordville.com/NT-BiblioCom.html>

Located in the Bibliography section of cranfordville.com is a growing number of references to hard copy treatments on the Gospel of John. This includes both commentaries and articles.