Great Figures of the New Testament
Parts I & II
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Amy-Jill Levine earned her B.A. with high honors in English and Religion at Smith College, where she graduated magna cum laude and was a member of Phi Beta Kappa. Her M.A. and Ph.D. in Religion are from Duke University, where she was a Gurney Harris Kearns Fellow and W. D. Davies Instructor in Biblical Studies. Before moving to Vanderbilt, she was Sara Lawrence Lightfoot Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Religion at Swarthmore College.

Professor Levine’s numerous publications address Second-Temple Judaism, Christian origins, Jewish-Christian relations, and biblical women. She is currently editing the twelve-volume Feminist Companions to the New Testament and Early Christian Literature for Continuum, completing a manuscript on Hellenistic Jewish narratives for Harvard University Press, and preparing a commentary on the Book of Esther for Walter de Gruyter (Berlin). Dr. Levine has served on editorial boards of the Journal of Biblical Literature and the Catholic Biblical Quarterly and has held office in the Society of Biblical Literature (including President of the Southeast Region and Chair of the Matthew Group), the Catholic Biblical Association (Executive Committee), and the Association for Jewish Studies. Her awards include grants from the Mellon Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the American Council of Learned Societies.

A widely sought-after speaker, Dr. Levine has lectured throughout the United States, as well as in Canada and the United Kingdom, for universities, synagogues, and churches. For The Teaching Company, she has contributed both Introduction to the Old Testament and Great Figures of the Old Testament.

As a graduate student, Levine was initially prevented from teaching New Testament at Duke Divinity School by an administrator who thought it an inappropriate placement for a Jew. “You can teach Old Testament,” he told her. “I don’t do Old Testament,” she said; “You do now,” was his response. Soon, the administrator was no longer at Duke, but Dr. Levine continued studying Old Testament (TaNaK) along with the New … and has been studying and teaching both ever since.
Dr. Levine; her husband, Jay Geller, Ph.D. (who also teaches at Vanderbilt); and their children, Sarah Elizabeth and Alexander David, live in Nashville, Tennessee.
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Great Figures of the New Testament

Scope:

The great figures of the earliest years of the church have been remembered in various ways, depending on the needs and interests of the evangelists and their communities, because stories of Jesus and the people surrounding him—both those who followed him and those who did not—took shape in a combination of historical memory, pastoral concern, and aesthetic taste. What one Gospel chose to highlight, another ignores; what one canonical text mentions in passing, later tradition substantially develops. Such ongoing fascination with the great figures and the increasing desire to know more about them testify to the vitality of the Christian imagination.

Both the portraits of these figures in the pages of the New Testament and their reframings throughout church history are today increasingly unfamiliar. There was a time when artists and teachers, as well as clergy and worshipers, could presume on the part of all their friends and neighbors a general cultural familiarity with the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son; students of art knew why a skull was often depicted at the foot of Jesus’ cross; and newspaper columnists recognized that the Immaculate Conception was not the same thing as the Virgin Birth. To fail to recognize these terms and images makes us all culturally poorer, let alone theologically more ignorant.

The Teaching Company’s The New Testament emphasizes the Bible’s historical context and the critical methods through which the texts have been interpreted; Great Figures of the New Testament, on the other hand, takes a closer look at specific characters: who they are, what they do, and how they have been assessed across the centuries by historians and artists, theologians at their desks, and worshipers in the pew.

The figures encountered encompass the range of the great figures from the nascent church: There are shepherds and kings, friends and enemies, evangelists and martyrs, a prodigal son and a good Samaritan. Each lecture begins by retelling in brief the story of the figure at hand.

Representing the models of Old Testament piety are the elderly couple Elizabeth and Zechariah; their son, John the Baptist, moves us immediately into the dangerous world of the first century, where
messianic fervor was on the rise and popular prophets knew their lives were in danger. We find a virgin, betrothed to a man named Joseph, who receives an annunciation from an angel, bears a child through the power of the Holy Spirit, and faces a parent’s greatest tragedy as she watches the death of her son. We encounter Jesus’ friends: the contemplative Mary and the vocal Martha, as well as their brother Lazarus. We join the conversations with Jesus’ interlocutors: Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman, the centurion with a paralyzed son and the desperate Canaanite mother with a demon-possessed daughter, the Pharisees and the Sadducees. We explore the stories of the Apostles—Peter and Thomas, James and John, Mary Magdalene (who becomes known as the Apostle to the Apostles), and Judas Iscariot—from the times they spent with Jesus to their post-canonical fates.

From the early years of the church, we find James, “the brother of the Lord,” Stephen the first martyr, and Philip the evangelist of Samaria. Recognizing not only their memorable roles in the canon but also their parts in establishing a historical context, we ask what we can know of the centurions who represent Rome’s military presence; Pontius Pilate, the Roman prefect who orders Jesus crucified; and the four generations of the Herodian royal family who appear in the pages of the New Testament.

For Paul the Apostle, we investigate both his presentation in Acts of the Apostles and what can be determined about him from his own letters. For Jesus, we take one lecture to speak of how he might have been perceived by those who knew him personally, then we conclude with the development of Christology, that is, how the “anointed one” was understood as a participant in the work of creation, as a new Adam, a perfect sacrifice, a suffering servant, the second part of the Trinity, and even a lactating mother.

Unlike primarily historical introductions to the Bible, including The Teaching Company’s The Old Testament and The New Testament, these lectures, along with those in the companion series Great Figures of the Old Testament, frequently raise issues of religious interest. The point of this exploration is not to inculcate any theology, let alone any particular religious worldview. Rather, it seeks to read the ancient texts anew to discover what they say and how they were interpreted by both the secular culture and the faithful church.
Note: Many scriptural quotations in the lectures are translated by Dr. Levine directly from the Hebrew or the Greek and, thus, may vary slightly with the text of standard printed editions in English. In other cases, Dr. Levine draws from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), the King James Version (KJV), and the New English Bible (NEB).
Lecture One
The New Testament

Scope: This lecture furnishes the rationales for the choices of the more than twenty “great figures” included in this series, introduces the tools of critical biblical study and the technical vocabulary related to it, and contributes a synopsis of the historical setting in which these figures lived and their stories were first told. Throughout, we shall sample test cases in which literary and historical approaches show the depth of the characters and the complexity of their stories. We conclude this lecture with a few comments on the theological implications of the academic study of the Bible. Designed neither to debunk nor to proselytize, the lectures in this series seek, rather, to provide a deeper understanding of the figures who anchor Christian origins and whose stories, told and retold from the first century to the present, provide insight into our diverse religious, societal, and aesthetic values. The great figures of the New Testament offer a wealth of information about early Christianity, a marvelously fertile ground for diverse cultural understandings, and a plethora of historical problems.

Outline

I. What are our criteria for choosing these twenty-four “great figures”?  
   A. We sought a combination of major figures, such as Jesus of Nazareth and the Virgin Mary, and less familiar ones, such as the Samaritan Woman at the Well and the Syro-Phoenician (or Canaanite) mother of a demon-possessed daughter.  
   B. Some characters warrant attention because of historical roles: The Herodian rulers and the centurions facilitate an exploration of the political situation in which Jesus lived and the church developed.  
   C. The series extends beyond “real people” to Jesus’ major literary creations, the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son, to see how they have been understood throughout the centuries.
II. What approaches will we use in our study?

A. We have actual (not disputed) documents from only one figure, Paul. In all other cases, we rely on secondary sources, many by authors who never met the figure.

B. For James, the brother of Jesus; John the Baptist; Pontius Pilate; and the Herodians, we have contemporaneous non-Christian sources.

C. For several figures, we have a trove of legends. For example, we’ll see how Mary Magdalene became a penitent prostitute, even though the Gospels depict her neither as prostitute nor penitent; we’ll see how the “Beloved Disciple” of the Fourth Gospel became identified as John, the son of Zebedee.

D. We’ll look at theological and political appropriations: How did Peter become the first Pope? How was Paul’s legacy used by both “orthodox” and “heretical” groups?

E. We’ll see how cultural values influence character assessment: Why has Judas been understood as a symbol of Judaism, a political revolutionary, even a tragically romantic hero? How did the Magi, who are neither kings nor (necessarily) three, male, from the Orient, or wise, become, in art and song, all these and more? Why does Jesus abrogate dietary regulations in Mark and preserve them in Matthew?

III. Even historical records reflect their author’s interests and aesthetics. We will celebrate these diverse perspectives rather than homogenize and flatten them.

A. We offer two lectures on Paul because the portrait painted in Acts differs from the impression gleaned from his Epistles.

B. We present two lectures on Jesus: One assesses reconstructions of the “historical” figure; the other explores christological development, such as claims for divine pre-existence and debates over both his humanity and his divinity.

C. We explore how literary and theological templates shape New Testament stories: how Mary’s husband Joseph models the Joseph of Genesis; how Lazarus, who emerges from the tomb, relates to the Lazarus of Luke’s parable; how Stephen’s death resembles that of Jesus.
D. We assess conflicting information: To whom did Jesus first appear, Peter or Mary Magdalene? Is the Baptist to be equated with Elijah? Do Paul and James agree over the terms of the Gentile mission?

E. We seek to understand polemic and propaganda: Who are the Pharisees and Sadducees, and why do the Gospels treat them so harshly? Why does Pontius Pilate appear increasingly less culpable from Gospel to Gospel and then to later legend?

F. We acknowledge that the time of Christian origins is substantially different from today: How would the original readers of Philip’s story understand Simon Magus or the eunuch official? Why would ancient readers expect to find shepherds at the birth of a god?

IV. We will use a specialized vocabulary for our study.

A. For dating, biblical scholars often use B.C.E. (before the common/Christian era) in place of the “confessional” B.C. (before Christ) and C.E. (common/Christian era) in place of A.D. (anno Domini, “in the year of our Lord”).

B. Evangelist is used for a Gospel’s author (e.g., Matthew, Mark, Luke, John); it comes from the Greek word eu-angelion, meaning “good news.”

C. A pericope (Greek for “cut around”) is an independent narrative unit, such as the story of Martha and Mary in Luke 10:38–42, parables, or miracle stories.

D. What Christians call the Old Testament is called, by Jews, the Tanach, an acronym for T (Torah, or Pentateuch); N (Nevi’im, or Prophets) and K (Ketuvim, or Writings). Ironically, neither term was used by the figures whose stories are analyzed in this series.

V. We must also work from some general assumptions of academic biblical studies.

A. The synoptic problem: The first three Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—are called synoptic because they “see together,” that is, they tell basically the same story with the same words. There is a literary relationship among them, and biblical scholars debate its formulation. Most scholars believe that Mark was composed first, then was used independently by the Gospels of Matthew and Luke,
along with a no-longer-extant source called “Q.” A minority believe Mark is an epitome of Matthew and Luke.

B. The relationship between John and the synoptics: Although John and the synoptics share substantial material, it remains unclear whether John had access to any of the first three Gospels. Nor is it clear why John wrote: to supplement, correct, or replace?


D. The distinctions between Paul and “Deutero-Pauline” literature: Pseudepigraphy, the ascribing of documents to famous figures, was common in antiquity, and Paul’s followers ascribed works to him. In addition to the non-canonical Third Corinthians, 1, 2 Timothy and Titus—the Pastoral Epistles—may also be pseudonymous; this theory affects our understanding of Paul’s views of politics, women, and church polity.

E. The role of the non-canonical materials: Early Christians wrote many documents in the first several centuries that were not included in the canon, including expanded stories of the lives of the Apostles and of Mary Magdalene, visions of the resurrected Jesus, alternative presentations of the Crucifixion, and numerous “secret teachings.” Their historical value is debatable; their cultural value for understanding the diverse views of the early Christians is enormous.

VI. We will examine some common misperceptions.

A. The Gospels are not “biographies” in the modern sense; depictions of figures in antiquity were designed to convey particular moral and political values. Moreover, ancient “lives” omit information today’s readers expect, such as physical descriptions and childhood experiences, even as they enhance the “noble death.”

B. Cultural appropriations should always be challenged by reading anew: Is Mary Magdalene a penitent or a prostitute? Is Pontius Pilate a weak dupe or a canny politician? Was John the Baptist a follower of Jesus or a rival?
VII. The first century C.E.

A. In the second century B.C.E., following the Maccabean Revolt, Judea gained independence from the Syrian-Greek Empire.
   1. The Hasmonean dynasty ruled more or less independently until 63 B.C.E., when Rome gained initial control.
   2. Herod the Great became King of Judea under the Roman protectorate in 37 B.C.E.

   1. During this time, the Temple of Jerusalem is destroyed (70 C.E.) and Christianity shifts from a Jewish sect to a Gentile movement.
   2. Christianity takes shape in dialogue and debate with other forms of Judaism, with various forms of pagan thought, and among different movements of Christian thought.

VIII. Academic biblical study is designed neither to destroy faith nor to proselytize for it.

A. Historical inquiry seeks to reveal how faith takes shape in culture and community.

B. As we debate such issues, we both challenge our presuppositions and come more fully to appreciate the rich complexity of the ancient sources.

Suggested Reading:


Questions to Consider:
1. To what extent is “faith” dependent on “what really happened”?
2. Should the Bible be approached differently than one might approach a study of Alexander the Great or the American Revolution?

3. It has been said that no history is objective. If so, what are the particular agendas of the biblical authors and of all those who have retold works?
Scope: John, called “Baptist” because he dipped (Gk: *baptizw*) people in the Jordan River as a sign that they had repented from their sins, appears in the Gospels and the writings of the Jewish historian Josephus. The gaps and varying emphases in these historical records, coupled with an appreciation for how John’s story is presented from different perspectives, offer the ideal opportunity to explore the means by which scholars of the New Testament address questions of history. This lecture looks at the story of John’s miraculous and, indeed, humorous birth; his connection to the Prophet Elijah; his possible associations not only with the Qumran community and, thus, the Dead Sea Scrolls but also with other charismatic religious leaders of the early first century C.E.; the various descriptions of his own message in light of both political and religious import; his remarkably unclear relationship to Jesus; and the different versions of his beheading at the command of Herod Antipas. We conclude with a brief review of how the Baptist has fared at the hands of theologians and artists, playwrights and filmmakers.

**Outline**

I. What are our sources for understanding John the Baptist?
   A. Joseph presents him as a popular leader executed by Herod as a preemptive strike.
   B. The synoptic Gospels present him as Elijah, a messianic forerunner, and depict Jesus’ baptism by John, yet they hint at rivalry between John and Jesus.
   C. The Gospel of John denies a connection between John and Elijah (John 1:21) and suppresses the direct baptism of Jesus by John; John serves entirely as the forerunner.

   A. Zechariah and Elizabeth conform to the convention of the elderly, infertile parents.
They are both of priestly descent, and Zechariah receives an annunciation while he is offering incense in the Temple.

Zechariah questions the forthcoming birth because “I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years.” Gabriel responds that such unbelief will cause Zechariah to be mute until the birth.

The scene of Zechariah’s attempt to explain to the crowd outside the Temple what happened inside likely is intended to be humorous.

Jesus’ superiority to John, indicated prenatally, confirms their rivalry:

1. When Mary visits her cousin Elizabeth and Elizabeth hears her greeting, “the baby leaped in her womb.”
2. John’s disciples ask Jesus: “Are you the one who is to come, or should we wait for another?” (Matt. 11:2–6).
3. As we move from Mark to the later Gospels, John is increasingly subordinated to Jesus, such that in John’s Gospel, it is not clear that John baptizes Jesus.

Zechariah confirms Elizabeth’s announcement at the child’s circumcision that he is to be called “John” and, at that point, regains his power of speech. Zechariah, filled with the Holy Spirit, prophecies John’s role as “prophet of the Most High” who will “go before the Lord to prepare his ways” (1:76).

John’s description resembles the Prophet Elijah through a fulfillment citation (a conflation of Isa. 40:3; Mal. 3:1; and Exod. 23:20: “the voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way of the Lord’”) and references to clothing, setting, and diet.

1. Elijah was expected to announce the messianic age (Mal. 4:5 [3:24 MT]), and since Elijah never “died,” his return was conceivable.
3. Following the Transfiguration in which Jesus appears with Moses and Elijah, the disciples ask, “Why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?” Jesus cryptically responds that Elijah has come (Mark 9:11–13).
4. The Gospel of John (1:21) depicts the Baptist explicitly denying he is Elijah.
IV. John’s asceticism, diet, immersions (“Baptist” comes from the Greek *baptizw*, “to dip”), and eschatological (that is, “end of the world”) concerns suggest a connection to the Qumran community. His interest in a “new family” determined by faith rather than biology (Matt. 3:9) fits their model, as well.

A. Josephus records non-Essene desert ascetics; similar also are Philo’s Therapeutae.

B. We may at least state that John shares common interests with the Qumran community, but claiming a direct association with Qumran for either John or Jesus is more than the evidence warrants.

V. What was John’s program?

A. Josephus records: “He was a good man and had exhorted the Jews to lead righteous lives, to practice justice towards their fellows and piety towards God, and so doing to join in baptism. In his view, this was a necessary preliminary if baptism was to be acceptable to God. The Jews must not use it to gain pardon for whatever sins they had committed but as a consecration of the body that implied that the soul was already thoroughly cleansed by right behavior.”

1. Did Josephus suppress the apocalyptic elements: “Repent, for the Kingdom is at hand” (Matt. 3:2)? Did the Gospels enhance them; for example, Luke 3:7–9: “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? … Already the axe is laid to the root of the trees; every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire”?

2. John “preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Mark 1:4 and pars.); therefore, the church needed to explain why Jesus presented himself to John.

3. Were some of Jesus’ early followers originally followers of John: Tax collectors? Sinners? John 1:40 records that Andrew, Peter’s brother, was John’s disciple.

B. Was John in competition with the Jerusalem Temple?

C. If John were baptizing on the southern border of Perea, near Machaerus where he was executed, did people cross the desert to him? Did they cross the Jordan as did Joshua?
VI. John’s arrest and death.

A. “Herod … seized John and bound him in prison because of Herodias, the wife of Philip his brother, because he married her, for John said to Herod, ‘It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife’” (Mark 6:17–18; so Lev. 18:16; 20:21).

B. “Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to kill him,” but she is prevented by Herod, who perceives John to be righteous and holy (Mark 6:19–20).

C. “But an opportune [eukairou] day came, when Herod gave a supper for his courtiers, and officers, and the chief men of Galilee on his birthday, and Herodias’s daughter entered and danced. She pleased Herod and the ones dining with him. And the king said to the girl [korasion]: ‘Ask me whatever you wish, and I will give it to you.’ And he swore to her, ‘Whatever you ask I will give up to half of my kingdom.’”

1. Eukairou is used in Mark 14:11 for Judas.
2. Korasion is used for Jairus’s twelve-year-old daughter (5:41).
3. The offer of half the kingdom appears in Est. 5:3 and elsewhere.
4. The scene itself suggests a fictional or folkloric model: Princesses royal did not dance before men at parties; the implication of the story is that Herod is debauched.

D. Prompted by Herodias, the daughter requests John’s head. Herod immediately gives the order, although “he was exceedingly sorry.” “He brought his head on a platter and gave it to the young girl and the young girl gave it to her mother” (Mark 6:28). Herod anticipates Pilate, who was also “manipulated” into killing a righteous and holy person.

E. Josephus (Ant. 18:116–19): “But to some of the Jews, the destruction of Herod’s army seemed to be divine vengeance, and certainly a just vengeance, for his treatment of John, surnamed the Baptist. For Herod had put him to death …”

VII. Appropriations include Flaubert’s Herodias; Mallarmé’s “Herodiade,” Oscar Wilde’s “Salome” (and R. Strauss’s opera), and Aubrey Beardsley’s “The Dancer’s Reward.”
A. Cultural appropriations have shown more interest in “Salome” than in John. She fills the same role of “dangerous lover” as do Jael and Judith.

B. Herodias is already portrayed by Mark as a new Jezebel to John’s Elijah, and her negative portrayal continues.

C. John is sometimes considered an unapproachable albeit sexy figure, from Wilde’s play to most biblical “epics” (think of Charlton Heston).

VIII. John (and Jesus) may be associated with other millennial prophets.

A. The “Samaritan prophet” in 36 led a crowd to Mt. Gerizim, where he promised to show the sacred vessels Moses deposited. Pilate sends out the cavalry, and a massacre ensues. Consequently, Pilate is deposed.

B. Between 44 to 46, “A certain imposter named Theudas persuaded the majority of the masses to take up their possessions and follow him to the Jordan River. He stated that he was a prophet, and that at his command the river would be parted and would provide them an easy passage. With this talk, he deceived many. Fadus, however, did not permit them to reap the fruit of their folly, but sent against them a squadron of cavalry.” Theudas is beheaded (*Ant*. 20; see Acts 5:36).

C. Under Felix, “A still worse blow was dealt at the Jews by the Egyptian false prophet. A charlatan, who had gained for himself the reputation of a prophet, this man appeared in the country, collected a following of about 30,000 dupes, and led them by a circuitous route from the desert to the Mount of Olives. From there he proposed to force an entrance into Jerusalem, and after overpowering the Roman garrison, to set himself up as a tyrant of the people, employing those who poured in with him as his bodyguard” (*War* 2; *Ant*. 20 mentions that the Egyptian claimed that at his command, the walls of Jerusalem would fall; see also Acts 21:38).

Suggested Reading:


**Questions to Consider:**

1. How might we assess the divergent emphases of all four Gospels, as well as Josephus?
2. What might have prompted Jesus to separate from John?
3. To what extent was John’s baptism of Jesus an “embarrassment”?
Lecture Three
The Virgin Mary

Scope: Unwed mother or Mother goddess, Mary the mother of Jesus inspires loyalty even as she provokes controversy. This lecture addresses those elements of her life and legend that continue to stimulate historical and theological debate. From the canonical materials we explore the prediction of a Virgin Birth, her relationship to her cousin Elizabeth (the mother of John the Baptist), questions of her “perpetual virginity,” her understanding of Jesus’ mission, and her life following the Crucifixion. We then turn to the development of “Mariology”: accounts of her childhood; the doctrines of the Immaculate Conception and Assumption of the Virgin; her roles as new Eve, Mediatrix, Bride of Christ, and Queen of Heaven; as well as her reception in pagan, Jewish, and Islamic writings; and her current role in Orthodox, Protestant, and Catholic thought. We end with observations on the increasingly common phenomenon of Marian apparitions, including those at Lourdes, Fatima, Medjugorje, and Conyers, Georgia.

Outline

I. Mary of Nazareth.
   A. Her name, one of the first century’s most popular, evokes both Miriam of the Exodus and Mariamne I, the Hasmonean wife of Herod the Great.
   B. Mary’s class status is unclear: If Joseph is a Davidide with property in Bethlehem, she may be relatively wealthy.
   C. Later church tradition suggests that she, like Joseph, is of Davidic descent. Luke’s account of her cousin Elizabeth hints at a priestly connection.

II. Jesus’ Virgin Birth is explicit in Matthew and suggested in Luke.
   A. Mark begins with the preaching of the Baptist. John either does not know or suppresses the Virgin Birth: Philip tells Nathaneal, “‘We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote: Jesus of Nazareth, son of Joseph’” (John 1:45).
B. “When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they had come together, she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit … All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, ‘Behold, a virgin [parthenos] shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel [meaning ‘God with us’]’” (Matt. 1:18, 23).

1. Matthew, who uses “fulfillment citations” to anchor Jesus to Israel, cites Isa. 7:14 (LXX); the MT mentions a pregnant young woman (almah).

2. Emmanuel frames Matthew’s narrative; “I am with you” reappears in 28:20.

C. The Annunciation: Gabriel is sent to “a city of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And he came to her and said, ‘Hail, O favored one, the Lord is with you’” (Luke 1:26–28; some manuscripts add: “Blessed are you among women”).

D. Mary is fearful, but Gabriel assures her: “You have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son …” Mary, echoing Zechariah, asks, “How shall this be, since I have not known a man?” Gabriel responds: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born [of you] will be called ‘holy’” (Luke 1:29–35).

1. The Spirit’s “overshadowing” need not indicate a virginal conception.

2. The Annunciation complements Luke’s political concern of contrasting Jesus with caesars and emperors (such as Alexander the Great and Augustus Caesar); Justin Martyr (c. 160) acknowledges connections between the Virgin Birth and pagan mythology.

E. The implications of the Virgin Birth are initially christological.


2. The Valentinians claimed “Jesus passed through Mary like water through a tube.”

III. The Magnificat.

A. Immediately after Gabriel tells her of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, Mary responds: “Behold, I am the slave (Gk: doule) of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” (Luke 1:36–38).
1. Translations of “handmaid” are more genteel than Luke’s Greek (see also 1:48).

2. Mary “went with haste into the hill country” to visit Elizabeth (1:39). Some interpreters suggest that she needed Elizabeth’s support given her state of unwed pregnancy.

B. Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, greets her: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb” (1:42), and Mary replies with the “Magnificat,” Luke 1:46–55, a hymn named for the Latin first word.

1. The hymn echoes Hannah’s song in 1 Sam. 2:1–10, and some ancient manuscripts attribute it to Elizabeth, who more closely resembles Hannah.

2. The Magnificat celebrates liberation: “He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree” (v. 52).

3. The Magnificat may be compared with other “hymns” in Luke’s nativity account. The Septuagintal style of this section evokes the “world of the Old Testament.”

IV. During Jesus’ ministry, Mary does not appear in the synoptic tradition as a follower.

A. When Mary and Joseph present Jesus in the Temple, Simeon reports to Mary, “A sword will pierce though your own soul also” (Luke 2:35).

B. When, following the Passover pilgrimage, she and Joseph discover Jesus missing and seek for three days (anticipating the Resurrection), they find him in the Temple. Mary says, “Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been looking for you anxiously” (Luke 2:48). Jesus responds that he had to be “in my Father’s house,” but Mary and Joseph do not understand. The family returns to Nazareth, Jesus “was obedient to them,” and “his mother kept all these things in her heart.”

C. When his family attempts to see him, he responds, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” Looking at those seated about him, he states, “Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother” (Mark 3:31–35; Matt. 12:46–50; Luke 8:19–21).

D. However, according to John 2, “the mother of Jesus” (she is unnamed) prompts Jesus to provide wine at Cana; thus, her role as mediatrix is anticipated.
V. Only John explicitly notes Mary’s presence at the cross.
   A. “When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, ‘Woman, behold your son!’ Then he said to the disciple, ‘Behold your mother!’ And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home” (John 19:26-27).
   B. According to Acts 1:14, the Apostles “with one accord devoted themselves to prayer, together with the woman and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.”

VI. Immaculate Conception.
   A. The *Protevangelium of James* (a second-century account of Mary’s conception, childhood, and marriage to Joseph; the text is part of the New Testament Apocrypha, a type of Christian *midrash* or hagiography) adopts the convention of the infertile elderly couple (such as Zechariah and Elizabeth) to describe Mary’s conception. Mary’s mother Anna is another “Hannah” (Samuel’s mother) who dedicates her child to the Temple at age three. The Protevangelium, although containing some very early material, is today regarded as fiction. Anna and Joachim are no longer on the calendar of saints.
   B. According to John of Damascus, “If Mary had been exempt from all temptation, Christ would not have died for her sins.” Rom. 3:23 states, “we all have sinned.”
   C. In the West, with the development of Original Sin by Ambrose (c. 391) and Augustine and its corollary, infant baptism, Mary’s sinlessness became emphasized.
   D. In 1854, Pope Pius IX proclaimed the Doctrine of the Immaculate Conception.

VII. The belief in Mary’s perpetual virginity also begins with the *Protevangelium*.
   A. Joseph did “not know Mary until she had borne a son” (Matt. 1:25); the Gospels’ “brothers” and “sisters” could connote cousins or associates.
   B. According to the *Protevangelium*, Mary must leave the Temple when she turns twelve (age of menarche). The priests betroth her to the widower Joseph, whose grown son, James, is the ostensible narrator.
1. Joseph states, “I have sons and am old, and she is a girl” (9:20).
2. According to Epiphanius, Joseph was over eighty, with four sons and two daughters, when he became engaged to Mary.

C. Bearing Jesus in a cave at midnight stillness, Mary does not cry out. The local midwife, Salome, hearing that “a virgin has brought forth,” confirms Mary’s ongoing virginity (19:1–20:4). Similar comments appear in the Ascension of Isaiah: “Mary suddenly beheld a small child, and she was amazed. When her amazement wore off, her womb was found as it was before she was with child … and many said, ‘She has not given birth; the midwife has not gone up to her, and we have heard no cries of pain.’”

D. As celibacy became increasingly valued, Mary’s virginal status became the ideal for women, as Jesus’ virginity and John’s became the ideal for men.

E. Today, the image of the virgin mother is both liberating and constraining, depending on the concerns of the interpreter.

VIII. Assumption/Dormition of the Virgin.
   A. The stories of Mary’s “falling asleep” insist on the incorruptibility of her body.
   B. In 1950, Pope Pius XII proclaims the Doctrine of the Assumption of the Virgin.

IX. Following Constantine, Mary’s role begins to develop exponentially.
   A. The Gospel of Philip states: “Adam came into being from two virgins: from the Spirit and from the earth. Christ therefore was born of a virgin to rectify the fall. …”
   B. Eva, reversed, is Ave.
   C. Reflecting appropriations of the Song of Songs (Canticles) and Rev. 12, ancient goddess traditions (especially of Isis), psychological yearnings for a powerful female presence in heaven, increasing attention to Marian devotion, and the political sensibilities of the Middle Ages, Mary becomes recognized as Queen of Heaven and Bride of Christ.
X.  Pagan, Jewish, Protestant, and Islamic implications.
   A.  Artistic renderings of the Madonna and child resemble portraits of
        Isis and Horus; the “Black Madonna” may reflect goddess
        traditions, Cant. 1:5, and/or apotropaic power.
   B.  Protestant traditions typically accept the Virgin Birth but withdraw
        from emphasis on Mary *per se*, in part through self-definition in
        relation to medieval Catholic thought.
   C.  In Islamic thought, Mary is not without sin and Jesus is not divine.

XI. Marian appearances.
   A.  The sixteenth-century appearance of the Virgin of Guadalupe
        facilitated an assimilation of European Catholic tradition to
        indigenous Mexican religion.
   B.  Appearances to children (Knock, LaSalette, Lourdes, Fatima)
        record originally conflicting information, with Mary’s explicit
        appearance a later development.
   C.  The appearances often carry political or cultural messages.

Suggested Reading:
Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah, A Commentary on the
Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke*. New York:
Raymond E. Brown, Karl P. Donfried, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and John
Jaroslav Pelikan, David Flusser, and Justin Lang, *Mary. Images of the
Mother of Jesus in Jewish and Christian Perspective*. Philadelphia: Fortress

Questions to Consider:
1.  What is the value of having a female figure, as opposed to a male, to
    whom prayers can be addressed or with whom the worshiper might
    identify?
2.  Do men and women relate to Mary differently?
Lecture Four
Joseph, Magi, and Shepherds

Scope: No Christmas scene is complete today without Mary’s husband, Joseph; the Magi who followed the miraculous star; and the shepherds told by angels that the messiah is born in Bethlehem. But all these figures give rise to both historical debate and later legend. This lecture begins with Joseph, from his brief and enigmatic function in the Gospels to later legends of his own perpetual virginity. We turn next to the Magi to see how these characters, whose profession many in the ancient world would have regarded as foolishness, came to be known as both kings and “wise men” (and, in some medieval depictions, women as well), and eventually to receive a set of numbers, names, and physical descriptions. Finally, we discuss the idea that in antiquity, the shepherds would have been expected attendants at the birth of a god. Throughout, we address how the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, and their later interpreters, depicted these figures to promote their own views of history, theology, and even politics.

Outline

I. Joseph.
   A. Although both Matthew and Luke provide Joseph’s genealogies, the details differ.
      1. Matthew takes Joseph through the royal line (David to Solomon); Luke takes him through Nathan, a different son of David.
      2. Matthew has Joseph as the son of Jacob, beginning several associations between the Joseph of the New Testament and the Joseph of the Old.
   C. Both Gospels depict Joseph as from Bethlehem (in Matthew, he resides there), the “city of David.”
II. “A census went out from Caesar Augustus, that all the world be enrolled. This was the first registration of its king. It took place when Quirinius was governor of Syria” (Luke 2:1–2).

A. This account presents historical problems.
   1. Quirinius was not the local legate during the reign of Herod, who appears in Matthew’s infancy account: Herod died c. 4 B.C.E. Quirinius was appointed in 6 C.E. At that time, when the census was proclaimed, Judas the Galilean led a revolt against Rome (see Acts 5:36–37).
   2. Nor is there an account of a general census during Herod’s reign.
   3. It is unlikely that a registration for the entire Roman Empire would either require everyone to return home or wives to accompany husbands.

B. Luke is writing a political manifesto (as in the Magnificat): Do we follow Caesar or Jesus?
   1. Virgil (Aeneid 6): “This is he whom thou so oft hearest promised to thee, Augustus Caesar; son of a god, who shall set up the golden age.”
   2. Horace (Odes 4): “Thine age, O Caesar, has … wiped away our sins and revived our ancient virtues.”
   3. The Decree of the Provincial Assembly of Asia (c. 9 B.C.E.) records: “Whereas the birthday of the god [Augustus] has been for the whole world the beginning of good news [eu-angellion] concerning him. …”

C. Obedient to the census, Joseph and Mary are nonviolent, solid residents of the empire.

III. Plans to divorce Mary: According to Matthew, Joseph is told in a dream that the child Mary carries is conceived by the “Holy Spirit” and, therefore, he should not be afraid to marry her.

A. The dreams again connect Joseph to the Joseph in the Book of Genesis.

B. Matthew describes Joseph as a “righteous” man, a theme in the Gospel.

C. The concern for divorce may reflect the midrash on the plans of Amram to divorce Jochebed (and, thus, prevent Moses’s conception).
IV. The flight to Egypt.

A. Herod, a new Pharaoh, arranges for the death of all children aged two and under in the region. Joseph takes his wife and child to Egypt; on their return, they go not back to Bethlehem but to Nazareth, in the Galilee (hence “Jesus of Nazareth”).

1. Joseph’s fidelity keeps Matt. 2 from being read as a Jewish/Gentile dichotomy.
2. The original Joseph also saved his family by bringing them to Egypt.

B. Jesus will go through the waters of baptism, as the children of Israel passed through the Red Sea; face temptation in the wilderness, as did the Israelites with the golden calf; and ascend a mountain to deliver a Law, as did Moses on Sinai.

C. According to Matt. 13:55, Joseph is a tekton, a “builder” or “carpenter”; Mark 6:3 refers to Jesus as a tekton. The Infancy Gospel of Thomas depicts young Jesus helping in the carpentry shop.

V. Joseph disappears after the incident in the Temple when Jesus is twelve. Later legend, such as the Protevangelium of James, develops the portrait of an aged widower. Joseph eventually becomes hailed as a virgin and his “children” become nephews and nieces.

VI. The Magi (Matt. 2): “We Three Kings of Orient Are.”

A. The Magi are not kings. Magi (the plural of Magus, as in Simon Magus, whom we meet in the lecture on Philip) are rather priestly astrologers.

1. Their association with kings begins in the sixth century; at this time, the star they followed becomes associated with the Chi Rho, the sign of Constantine. The implication: Just as kings pay homage to Jesus, so all kings should pay homage to the emperor.
2. Proof texts to support the identification of kings included Isaiah 60 and Psalm 72.
3. In Renaissance art, one is typically effeminate and may be female (the depiction is a good example of Western “Orientalism”).
4. Matthew does not favor earthly kings, as we see from the first king mentioned, “King Herod”; Pilate represents Roman rule,
and he is a coward; Satan offers Jesus earthly rule (Matt. 4:8–9) as if he had the authority to do so; Jesus states, “the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them” (Matt. 20:25). Indeed, Herod treats the Magi as servants.

B. The Magi are typically servants in royal courts.
   1. Suetonius reports that Tiberius banished all astrologers from Rome in 19 C.E.
   2. Magi could be perceived to be opponents to, and victims of, kingly rule.
   3. Yet Persian legend speaks of Magi as present at the birth of King Cyrus, whom the Prophet Isaiah proclaims a “messiah” or “anointed one.”

C. Jews would have viewed the Magi as practitioners of inept or evil magic.

D. The number of Magi has varied across the centuries.

E. They see the star anatole, “at its rising” or “in the east.” Given the variation in translation, early Christian art associates them with the Roman faithful; thus, they are depicted as traveling from west to east, rather than from Babylon to Judea.
   1. The star itself, the source of substantial astronomical speculation, might better be taken as part of ancient lore: Astronomical portents were expected at the birth and death of famous men. Thus, the earth becomes dark at the Crucifixion.
   2. No star shines directly over a “house”; perhaps this image may also hint at the humorous aspect of the Magi.

VII. The “wise men.”
   A. The term “wise men” was first applied to the Magi by a wise man, the Venerable Bede, an eighth-century British monk, but Matthew’s readers would not regard them as “wise.”
   B. To inquire in Jerusalem, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?” (Matt. 2:2) is at best politically inastute.
   C. The Magi show no awareness of Herod’s plot to kill his rival.
   D. Matthew is not in favor of book-based wisdom; as Jesus states (11:25): “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for hiding these things from the learned and wise and revealing them to the simple.”

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E. Eventually, they gain names (Caspar, Balthassar, and Melchior) and descriptions.

VIII. The shepherds.
A. Shepherds attend the birth of gods, such as Zeus and Orpheus.
B. They also represent the poor; therefore, they fit Luke’s Gospel, in which Jesus states, “Blessed are you poor” and in which the poor, rather than those with gold, attend the birth.

IX. Cultural representations.
A. The first crèche (presepio in Italian), was set up by St. Francis in 1223; they typically feature both Magi and shepherds.
B. Medieval churches claimed the relics of the wise men.
C. Giancarlo Menotti’s “Amahl and the Night Visitors” retells their story.
D. O’Henry’s “Gift of the Magi” takes only the name.
E. Adoration of the Shepherds by Rembrandt, painted in 1646, shows the night nativity with several domestic details, such as a boy playing with a dog.

Suggested Reading:


Questions to Consider:
1. How would the Christmas story be retold if the political implications of the evangelists were taken with full seriousness?
2. To what extent do representations of the shepherds and Magi confirm or challenge our views of people “other” than us?
Lecture Five

Peter

Scope: The transformation of a headstrong Galilean fisherman into the first leader of the Jerusalem church and, ultimately, according to medieval Roman Catholic teaching, the first pope, is an astounding, inspirational, and frequently confusing story. This lecture follows the Gospels’ presentations of Simon the son of Jonah from his fishing business in Capernaum and possible association with John the Baptist to his role as leader of the Twelve (disciples) and leader of the church. Scenes addressed include his call, his being given the nickname “Peter” (i.e., “Rocky”), his denial of Jesus, and his restoration as witness to the Resurrection. We next investigate his role in the early church, including his struggles with the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem, as well as with Paul; his conversion of Cornelius; and his role in the Jerusalem Council. Finally, we address his post-canonical fate, including legends of his crucifixion during Nero’s persecution.

Outline

I. The Galilean fisherman.
   A. His name, Simon, is Greek (as are Andrew and Philip). Acts 15:14 introduces him as “Symeon,” which is Semitic (cf. Saul/Paul). The Greek suggests an association with not only Capernaum but also the highly Hellenized Bethsaida.
   B. Business in Capernaum was good; dues on goods were collected in Capernaum; fishermen with employees (“servants”) found a ready market for their products.
   C. Peter was married: Jesus heals his mother-in-law and Paul notes (1 Cor. 9:5) that Peter was accompanied by a “sister-wife.”
   D. Capernaum’s “House of St. Peter” was the site of a fourth-century house-church, later an octagonal church, and eventually, a basilica. The site is not in one of the wealthier neighborhoods, but the lower Galilee was not facing abject poverty either. In other words, Peter did not join Jesus because of economic insecurity.
II. The call narrative.

A. According to Mark 1:16–20 (Matt. 4:18–22; see also Luke 5:10), Jesus summons Peter, Andrew, James, and John, who leave “everything” and become “fishers of men.” In Matthew and Mark, Jesus then cures Peter’s mother-in-law, who rises to “serve” them. Her daughter, Peter’s wife, is not mentioned.

B. Luke 4:16–39 depicts Jesus preaching in the synagogue and curing the mother-in-law before the call. The summons (omitting Andrew) occurs after a miraculous catch of fish (5:1–11), and Peter’s response is “Depart from me Lord, for I am a sinful man.”

C. According to John 1:35–40, Andrew is a disciple of the Baptist who joins Jesus, then summons his brother. The “Beloved Disciple” with Andrew precedes Peter into Jesus’ movement, and he continues throughout the Fourth Gospel as Peter’s rival.

III. Preeminent disciple.

A. The inner circle of Peter, James, and John witnesses the healing of Jairus’s daughter (Mark 5:37 and pars.) and the Transfiguration (Mark 9:2; Matt. 17:1; Luke 9:28). Peter, also with John and James, will fail to support Jesus during his agony in Gesthemane.

B. At the Transfiguration, Peter proposes to construct three tents: for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah (perhaps as shrines?). Mark 9:16 states that the remark was prompted by confusion.

C. In Matthew, where Peter’s role is highlighted, Jesus has Peter pay the Temple tax for the two of them by means of an opportune moment of fishing (Matt. 17:26–27).

IV. Caesarea Philippi.

A. The two-stage healing of the blind man of Bethsaida (Mark 8:22 ff.) anticipates Peter’s confession (8:27–30) and Jesus’ passion prediction (8:31–33).

B. Jesus asks, “who do people say I am” and implicitly rejects the responses (Elijah, John the Baptist, Jeremiah, a Prophet). Peter responds: “You are the Christ.”

C. Jesus responds, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.” In John’s version, Peter states: “You have the words of
eternal life. We have come to believe, and know that you are the Holy One of God” (6:68–69).

D. Only in Matthew does Jesus state: “You are Petros, and on this pe\textit{tra} I will build my church [\textit{ekklesia}].”

1. The Aramaic term for “rock” is \textit{kepha} (Greek: \textit{cephas}); in the Dead Sea Scrolls, the term refers to rocky cliffs.

2. The “rock” recollects the Baptist’s comment about raising up “stones” as Abraham’s children (Matt. 3:9) and anticipates Peter’s rejection of Jesus’ suffering as a “stumbling block” (\textit{skandalon}).

3. Theologians have debated whether the rock is Peter the individual, Peter’s faith, Peter as representative of Jesus’ followers, Peter as symbol of the church, and so on.

E. Matthew heightens Peter’s role by bestowing on him the “keys of the kingdom” (see Isa. 22:22), thus sanctioning his authority to “bind and loose.”

1. Josephus (\textit{War}. 1.5.1–3) notes that Salome Alexandra gave Pharisees the power to “banish and recall, to loose and bind.”

2. Matt. 23:14 claims the Pharisees shut the kingdom, preventing both themselves and others from entering.

F. Peter “sees” Jesus’ power but is “blind” to his role as one who suffers. Jesus responds, “Get behind me, Satan, for you are not on the side of God, but on the side of people” (Mark 8:33; Luke omits the rebuke).

V. The Last Supper.

A. In John, when Jesus attempts to wash his feet, Peter refuses, but when Jesus insists, he responds, “Not only my feet, but my head and hands also” (13:6–10).

B. Jesus predicts that before the cock crows twice, Peter will deny him three times (Mark 14:30), but Peter’s job will be to “turn and strengthen his brothers” (Luke 22:32).

VI. At Gesthemane (John’s “garden”), Jesus tells Peter, James, and John to remain awake while he prays, but they sleep and he is forced to wake them three times, because “the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak” (Mark 14:38).

A. The tradition records that at Jesus’ arrest, someone’s ear was sliced off. In Mark, the ear of the high priest’s slave is clipped by “one of
those who stood by” (14:47); in Matthew, it is “someone with Jesus” (26:51). Luke indicates that the disciples had swords (22:35–38) and that Jesus healed the slave’s ear (22:49–51); according to John 18:10–11, 26, Peter cuts off the ear of Malchus.

B. The disciples flee, but Peter follows the arresting party to the high priest’s house.

VII. In the high priest’s courtyard, three times Peter denies knowing Jesus (Mark 14:54, 66–72; Matt. 26:58, 69–75; Luke 22:54–62; John 18:15–27).

A. Peter’s denial of Jesus and his own discipleship (Mark 14:53–72) occurs simultaneously with Jesus’ affirmation of his identity.

B. The guards taunt Jesus, “prophecy” (Mark 14:64) while the pericope concludes with Peter’s remembering the prophecy of betrayal, “and he broke down and wept” (14:72).

C. This is Peter’s last appearance in Mark, where he is not clearly rehabilitated.

VIII. The Resurrection.

A. Mark records the young man’s commission, “tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee” (16:7), but the women remain silent.

B. At the “Great Commission” (Matt. 28:1–20), some among the eleven express “doubt.”
   1. Luke 24:34 depicts Peter (called “Simon”) as the first witness to the Resurrection; this is an alternative tradition to the priority given Mary Magdalene.
   2. According to 1 Cor. 15:3–5, Cephas is the first Resurrection witness.

C. According to John, Peter is present at the tomb and commissioned in Chapter 21: After a night of failing to catch fish, the disciples see a figure at dawn on the shore. He has them cast their nets, which then almost break from the weight of the fish. Realizing that the stranger is Jesus, Peter jumps into the water.

D. Jesus forgives the denial by three times asking Peter to express his love and three times commanding him “Feed my sheep.”
IX. Leader of the Jerusalem church (Book of Acts).

A. Peter’s activities include determining Judas’s replacement (1:15–16); offering sermons (Acts 2:14–36; 3:11–16; and so on); defending the church (4:8–12; 5:29–32); and exercising financial and moral authority (Ananias and Sapphira, 5:1–11).

B. Peter, like Jesus and Paul, heals the sick.
   1. To the lame beggar at the Temple he states, “I have no silver or gold, but I give you what I have; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk” (3:6; see Luke 9:1–6).
   2. His shadow heals; he cures Aeneas (9:32–35) and raises Tabitha (9:36–4).

C. Peter escapes prison on three occasions. In 12:1–19, Herod Agrippa kills James (brother of John) and imprisons Peter, who is then freed by a somewhat impatient angel. His return to the home of John Mark’s mother is laced with humor.

D. Following Philip’s successful preaching to, conversion of, and baptizing of Samaritans, Peter and John bestow on them the Holy Spirit. There, Peter has a conflict with Simon Magus. According to Eusebius (Eccl. Hist.), Peter also challenged Simon in Rome.

E. Peter converts the centurion Cornelius (Acts 10; cf. Lecture Twenty), the first (uncontested) Gentile to join the church without going through Judaism. Peter’s role is occasioned by his dream of clean and unclean animals, coupled with Cornelius’s summons.

X. Peter’s fate.

A. Gal. 2:7–9 and 1 Cor. 9:5 indicate that at least by the early 50s, Peter no longer lives in Jerusalem. Paul regards Peter as entrusted with the mission to the Jews and he, to the Gentiles; perhaps Peter evangelized in the Diaspora.

B. Peter’s connections with John Mark in Acts prompt the tradition, dating to Papias (second century, cited in Eusebius [Eccl. Hist. 3.39.15]), that Mark recorded Peter’s teachings.

C. John 21:18–19 suggests that Peter’s martyrdom is known, and 1 Peter (most likely a pseudepigraphical text) locates “Peter” in “Babylon” (=Rome; 5:13).
   1. Gaius the Presbyter (late second century) claims that Peter was martyred by Nero and buried on the Vatican Hill.
tomb/monument was in place by the third century, and fourth-century graffiti indicates that prayers were offered to him there.

2. According to legend, as Peter is leaving Rome, persuaded by fellow believers to escape Nero’s persecution, he sees Jesus entering the city and recognizes his own martyrdom. Peter determines to be crucified upside down.

3. Clement of Alexandria (Strom. 7) depicts Peter as encouraging his wife to martyrdom; thus, he is the “perfect Christian husband.”

XI. Works in his name.

A. The Petrine Epistles are pseudonymous.

B. The Gospel of Peter, which has little about Peter himself, exists only in fragmentary form. Some scholars think portions of this text antedate the canonical Gospels.

C. The Acts of Peter describes Peter’s contests with Simon Magus and his refusal to keep his paralyzed daughter healed because her beauty is a snare.

D. Ultimately, Peter is a figure of humor, loyalty, failure, and redemption.

Suggested Reading:


Questions to Consider:

1. To what extent is Peter responsible for the formation of Christianity as it came to be understood? Is he regarded even today differently by Catholics, Protestants, and Orthodox?

2. Is Peter a moral exemplar, a negative foil, or both?
Lecture Six
John and James, the Sons of Zebedee

Scope: Fishermen like Peter, John and James leave their father with his boats and embark on a fateful new life. Depicted in the synoptic Gospels as members of the inner circle of the Twelve, along with Peter and sometimes Andrew, they appear often to misunderstand Jesus: They seek the destruction of a Samaritan village, they do not understand the Transfiguration, they want the best seats in the kingdom, and they fall asleep during Jesus’ agony in Gethsemane. However, their later fidelity is unquestionable. James will be martyred by Herod Agrippa I (whom we meet in a later lecture). John’s fate is less clear: Church tradition assigns to him the role of author of the Fourth Gospel, as well as the “Beloved Disciple” described in it; attributes to him the composition of the Book of Revelation; construes him as a model of virginity; and accords to him a series of miracles and a miraculous death. Through the legends about him, we can trace some of the developing theology and self-definition of the church.

Outline

I. The names.
   A. “John” means “God has been gracious” (see 1 Chron. 26:3; Ezra 10:6); the name is popular, and its bearers include John the Baptist, Peter’s father (John 1:43; 21:15–17), John Mark, and John the relative of Annas (Acts 4:6).
   B. “James” is the Hellenized version of Iakob, or Jacob.
   C. “Zebedee” means “Gift of God.” The Acts of John by Prochorus suggests he was a Levite from Jerusalem.

II. The call: “Going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boats mending the nets. And immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and followed him” (Mark 1:19–20; Matt. 4:21–22).
A. John and James are not poor peasants, and they may have been educated and literate (but see Acts 4:13, which describes Peter and John as “uneducated” [agrammatoi] and “ordinary” [idiotoi]).

1. Amateur archaeologists in 1986 discovered a boat at the Sea of Galilee near Migdal; the shell measured 26.5 feet, with a width of 7.5 and a height of 4.5.

2. Fishing rights were purchased from the state.

3. Because Peter, Andrew, and Nathaniel were from Bethsaida (John 1:44), perhaps James and John were also from there. Eighth-century pilgrims were shown Zebedee’s house in Bethsaida.

B. Zebedee does not follow his sons and wife; the family, therefore, models Jesus’ new kinship group in which “no one is called father.”

C. If Peter and Andrew had followed the Baptist, perhaps John and James did, as well. According to Luke 5:10, John and James were Peter’s partners.

III. According to Matt. 20:20–21, the “Mother of the sons of Zebedee” comes to Jesus with her sons and kneels. When he asks, “What do you want?” she states, “Command that these two sons of mine may sit, one on your right hand and one on your left, in your kingdom.” Jesus replies, “You do not know what you are asking” and predicts that the sons (and mother?) “will drink my cup” (that is, of persecution and martyrdom). Mark records a similar story, but the brothers make the request themselves.

A. The request causes the other disciples to become indignant, which occasions Jesus’ comments about leadership and service (Matt. 20:24–28).

B. Among the “many women, looking on from afar, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, serving [diakonein] him were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee” (Matt. 27:55–56). She does not (explicitly) join the women at the tomb.

C. Church tradition variously names the wife Mary or Salome; she is regarded as a first cousin of Jesus’ mother.
IV. Boanerges, “Sons of Thunder” (Mark 3:17).

A. It remains unclear what Boanerges indicates in Aramaic: Sons of Commotion, of Anger, of Earthquake, or of Thunder?

B. When Jesus is rejected hospitality by a Samaritan village, “his disciples James and John saw it” and said, “Lord, do you want us to bid fire come down from heaven and consume them?” (Luke 9:51–56; see 2 Kings 1:10–12).

C. In Mark 9:38 (also Luke 9:49), John appears alone (the only occasion) to order a man to stop practicing exorcism in Jesus’ name.

V. On three occasions in Mark’s Gospel—the healing of Jairus’s daughter, the Transfiguration, and the night in Gethsemane—John and James, with Peter, form an inner circle. The three (Marcan) disciples who fail Jesus may be compared to the three women who fail to announce the Resurrection.

VI. Roles in Acts.

A. John initially appears with Peter in leadership roles (see, for example, Acts 4:13–22), and the two bestow the Holy Spirit upon the Samaritans (Acts 8:14–25).

B. “Herod the king [Agrippa I] laid violent hands upon some who belonged to the church. He killed James the brother of John with the sword, and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also” (Acts 12:1–3). Because John does not appear with Peter at the Apostolic Council described in Acts 15, some interpreters propose that John was martyred at the same time.

VII. Identification of the Fourth Gospel’s author.

A. The “Beloved Disciple” or “Disciple Whom Jesus Loved” is typically identified with John. Irenaeus (c. 180) states, “Afterward, John, the disciple of the Lord, who also reclined on his breast, published his Gospel, while staying in Ephesus in Asia.” He bases his claim on recollections by Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, whom he had known.

1. Johannine ascription supports Irenaeus’s concern for apostolic authority for the four (canonical) Gospels.
2. This disciple was known to Caiaphas (John 11:49–53; 18:3). The *Gospel of the Nazarenes* proposes that John, the son of a poor fisherman, delivered fish to the high priest’s home.

3. Other candidates include Lazarus (John 11:3, 36—based on the supposition that he might not die again); Mary Magdalene (some scholars find the disciple androgynous and propose his identity was deliberately obscured); Thomas; Philip; John Mark (because of his Jerusalem connections); and a composite ideal disciple.

B. The Beloved Disciple may represent a Johannine body in competition with the Petrine church. John 20:2–9 records: “Then, Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; he saw the linen cloths lying there, and the napkin, which had been on his head, not lying with the linen cloths but rolled up by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw, and believed.”

C. The Beloved Disciple, if not the author, is the authority behind the text, as 21:20–24 indicates. “Peter turned and saw following them the Disciple Whom Jesus Loved, who had lain close at his breast at the supper … This is the disciple who is bearing witness to all these things, and has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true.”


E. Johannine ascription is supported by the Revelation to the “John” who was imprisoned on Patmos (see Rev. 1:1, 4, 9; 22:8); Justin Martyr was the first to attribute Revelation to the Apostle, and he is followed by Melito of Sardis (160–190) and the Muratorian Canon (late second century?).
   1. Luther rejected the connection.
   2. The Gospel and Revelation were not composed by the same person; the Gospel is in good Greek; Revelation is Semiticized.

F. The content does not clearly support Johannine authorship.
   1. The Gospel never claims Johnnine authorship, and John is named only in Chapter 21, an appendix: “After this, Jesus
revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he revealed himself in this way. Simon Peter, Thomas called the twin, Nathaneal of Cana in Galilee, the two sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were gathered together.” John never lists the full Twelve, and the Beloved Disciple appears first only in John 13:23.

2. Would an eyewitness rely on a “signs source” (see 2:11; 4:54; 20:30) or omit such synoptic pericopae as the Lord’s Prayer, the Beatitudes, the Eucharist, and the parables?

3. Would Zebedee’s son refer to enemies as “the Jews”?

4. The Gospel may be the product of a Johannine “school.”

VIII. Legendary development.

A. By the fourth century, John models perpetual virginity. Legend identifies him as the groom at the Wedding at Cana: He is called by Jesus to remain a perpetual virgin, a “eunuch for the Kingdom of Heaven” (so Matt. 19). The bride he leaves is Mary Magdalene.

1. The celibate John is, like Joseph of Genesis and Peter’s daughter of legend, also lovely and, thus, a sexual snare. Epiphanius reports, contrary to Acts, that James also died a virgin, at age ninety-six.

2. From his connection to Jesus’ mother, John also appears in later Marian legend; he protects Mary’s body from “the Jews” in the Assumption of Mary.

B. Like Jesus, Peter, Paul, Thomas, and others, John heals and performs resuscitations; insects obey him; women leave their husbands and fiancés to follow his Gospel.

C. Tertullian cites a legend claiming that before his banishment, John was immersed in boiling oil in Rome. The Church of San Giovanni in Olio marks the location.

D. According to the Acts of John, at their call, James saw Jesus as a child and John as a handsome, cheerful man. When they reached shore, James saw a youth whose beard was just starting, and John saw a bald-headed man with a thick beard.

E. According to the Golden Legend of Jacobus de Voragine (c. 1260), John received four privileges: virginity, the revelation of Jesus’ divinity and of the eschaton, the keeping of the “mother of God” (so John 19), and the love of Christ.
F. In John 21:20–24, Peter asks, “Lord, what about this man?” Jesus responds, “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?” “The saying spread abroad … that this disciple was not to die, yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die but, ‘If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?’”

1. Legend develops that he died in Ephesus (two graves claimed authenticity, one of which is under the ruins of the Basilica of St. John [second to third century]).
2. John arranges for his grave to be dug; in some accounts, he lies there breathing still.
3. At the tomb, the faithful have claimed the appearance of miraculous dust, manna, and the rising and falling of the ground. The body remains uncorrupted.
4. Alternative traditions claim John and James were killed by “the Jews.”

G. Artistic appropriations include a magnificent portrait by El Greco, Longfellow’s “Saint John Wandering Over the Face of the Earth,” and in response to “higher biblical criticism,” Browning’s “A Death in the Desert.”

Suggested Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. Why would Jesus set up an “inner circle” of Peter, James, and John rather than treat all the Twelve as equals?
2. Why is James typically mentioned first when the brothers are named? Does the association of the Beloved Disciple with John serve to enhance John’s reputation over that of James the martyr?
3. What might have motivated a rich young man to leave his father and his business to follow Jesus? What effect might his mother have had on his religious development?
Lecture Seven

Martha, Mary, and Lazarus

Scope: Beloved friends of Jesus, Mary and Martha appear briefly in Luke’s Gospel, where Jesus mediates between Martha, who wants her sister’s help with serving, and Mary, whom Jesus insists has “chosen the better part.” Although Lazarus does not appear in this narrative, Luke recounts a parable about a certain Lazarus (the only named parable character) that may have influenced John’s composition. All three siblings play major roles in the Fourth Gospel: Martha offers the first complete understanding of Jesus, Mary anoints his feet, and the emergence of Lazarus from the tomb demonstrates that Jesus “is the resurrection and the life.” Historically, the siblings likely were householders who supported Jesus and his followers; that Martha owns the house and that the sisters appear unmarried offer clues to the roles of women in the movement. Martha’s “serving” (Gk: diakonein) may even indicate that she was a deacon. We conclude with the development of their stories: the legend of Lazarus’s murder and the means by which Martha and Mary come to represent the active and the contemplative life, respectively.

Outline

   A. In the 1970s, some biblical scholars suggested that “Luke” was a woman, given the numerous and often unique depictions of women in the Gospel and Acts (e.g., Mary, Elizabeth, and Anna in the nativity stories; the bent-over woman; women in parables, such as the Lost Coin and the Importuning Widow, Tabitha and Lydia).
   B. Today, Luke-Acts is more often seen as a parallel to the Pastoral Epistles: Women are prominent in “service” rather than leadership roles; women who hold positions of authority are criticized (Martha, John Mark’s mother).

II. Mary and Martha according to Luke 10:38–42.
   A. “He entered a village, and a woman named Martha received him into her house.”
1. Given that Martha is a homeowner, we should expect some criticism of her because the Lucan Jesus typically criticizes the wealthy and the settled.

2. The household is a nontraditional family, in keeping with the fictive kinship ethos.

3. John identifies the village as Bethany (11:1, 18), near Jerusalem; Luke’s scene is in Galilee.

B. “And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to his teaching.”
   1. Sitting at one’s feet is the position of a disciple; however, disciples typically engage in dialogue with the master; Mary remains silent.
   2. Women in both Jewish and pagan settings did learn from teachers/rabbis/masters, although they were by far outnumbered by men.
   3. The setting in a private home notes no “women’s quarters.”

C. “But Martha was distracted with much serving [diakonein], and she went to him and said, ‘Lord [Kyrios], do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her to help me.’”
   1. Diakonein is the same verb used in Luke 8:1–3 (there, often translated “provided”) to describe Mary Magdalene and others. Could it refer to a church office? It is not clear that the “serving” concerns food preparation (but cf. Acts 6).
   2. Martha mediates the relationship through Jesus; the sisters never converse.
   3. Kyrios can mean either “sir” or “Lord”; Martha speaks to Jesus in the imperative.

D. “But the Lord answered her, ‘Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things. One thing is needful. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.’”
   1. The narrator echoes Kyrios-language; Jesus is speaking here as true authority.
   2. “Many things” may refer to the demands of running a church.
   3. The one “needful thing” is, apparently, listening to Jesus’ teaching; one cannot act without prior instruction.
   4. Martha, the host, fails to note the needs of the guest.
Some manuscripts read “few things are needful”; this reading is likely secondary and is intended to ensure that non-contemplative work also be accomplished.

III. Lazarus of the Lucan parable (16:19–31).

A. Lazarus is the only named character in a parable; the rich man is often called “Dives” (Latin for “rich man”). Because the name is shared with Mary and Martha’s brother, scholars wonder about the relationship between Lucan parable and Johannine narrative. The footnote to the RSV reads “The person named here is not to be identified with the Lazarus of Jn. 11:1–44; 12.1,9.”

B. The contrast between wealthy and uncaring, poor and in need, is typically Lucan.

C. Lazarus’s lying in “Abraham’s bosom” indicates a place at the table (cf. Matt. 8:11); attendance at the heavenly banquet is not here dependent on Jesus’ sacrificial death.

D. The rich man’s appeal to “Father Abraham” recollects the Baptist’s comment about how God can raise up from stones children to Abraham.

E. The rich man seeks Lazarus’s return to earth to tell his brothers to behave morally, but Abraham says, “If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead” (16:31).

IV. Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, scene I.

A. “Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus” (11:5); the verse suggests to some scholars that Lazarus is the “Beloved Disciple” and, to others, that Jesus was related to the Bethany family.

B. When Lazarus takes ill, “Many of the Jews come to console Martha and Mary” (19). Atypical of John, here the “Jews” befriend the friends of Jesus.

C. “When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary sat in the house.” Consistent with Luke’s portrait, Martha is active while Mary is less so.

D. Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. And even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.”
1. Following this, Martha expresses Pharisaic piety: She believes in the Resurrection on the last day.
2. When Jesus responds that he is the Resurrection ("realized eschatology"), and so shatters conventional expectations, Martha expresses the correct christological confession: "I believe you are the Christ, the son of God, he who is coming into the world" (11:27).

V. Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, scene II.

A. Martha summons Mary: "The Teacher is here and is calling for you," although Jesus never did so. Some interpreters suggest that Mary, as Jesus’ wife, would wait for the summons.

B. When Mary, accompanied by Jewish friends consoling her, reaches the tomb, she falls at Jesus’ feet and repeats Martha’s comment, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

C. Jesus sees her weeping, and the weeping of the Jews with her, and he becomes "deeply moved in spirit and troubled,” but he does not speak to Mary directly. When he is then led to where Lazarus has been laid, “Jesus wept” (11:35). The reaction causes another schism among the Jews.

1. "Deeply moved and troubled” connotes, in the Greek, less emotional grief than anger and frustration or even snorting with anger.

2. Is Jesus concerned about how public this private matter had become? Is he aware of the schism that will result from Lazarus’s raising? Is he upset with Mary’s reaction? His own responsibility in causing grief to sisters he loves?

D. Jesus commands that the stone by Lazarus’s tomb be removed. Martha, “the sister of the dead man,” responds: “Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days.” This is Martha’s last line.

E. Jesus replies, “Did I not tell you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?” (11:40), although this statement has not been previously noted.
VI. Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, scene III.

A. “Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany. … There they made him a supper; Martha served [diakonein], and Lazarus was one of those at table with him” (12:1–2).
1. Plausibly, Martha’s “serving” was recalled in the tradition, but the evangelists provided different explanations for it.
2. This is Lazarus’s last scene. John 12:9–11 notes that when “the great crowd of Jews … came not only on account of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead, the chief priests planned to put Lazarus also to death, because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus.”

B. “Mary took a pound of costly ointment of pure nard and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair, and the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment.” When Judas—in this Gospel a thief—complains that the money could have been given to the poor, Jesus responds, “Let her alone, let her keep it for the day of my burial. The poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me” (12:3–8).
1. Judas suggests that the ointment could have been sold for 300 denarii: the equivalent of a year’s wages for a day laborer. His greed contrasts Mary’s generosity, and her generosity is repeated by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, who will entomb Jesus with 100 pounds of myrrh and aloe (there can be no “stink”).
2. Mary, like the unnamed anointing women of the synoptics, never speaks.
3. It is often argued that for a woman to let down her hair in public was shameful, but no text indicates this is a problem in a private home, and no one in John’s Gospel finds Mary’s actions “shameful.” Perhaps a better association is Cant. 4:1; 6:5.
4. These women proleptically fulfill Jesus’ final command: to wash the feet of others in a position of servitude and humility.

C. The woman in Mark 14:3–9 and Matt. 26:6–13 anoints Jesus’ head; the symbolism combines royal coronation with funerary practice.
D. The “woman who was a sinner in the city” (Luke 7:36) anoints his feet and wipes them with her hair: this is odd because one did not typically wipe off expensive ointment or use one’s hair to wipe someone’s feet.

VII. John’s non-penitent, non-crying woman named Mary is assimilated to Luke’s unnamed, weeping sinner; Luke’s unnamed sinner is associated with Mary Magdalene (Luke 8:1–3); Mary of Bethany then becomes associated with Mary Magdalene.

A. In one set of legends, Martha feeds her sister Mary (Magdalene), who has walled herself up in penitence for her evil ways.

B. In another, Martha represents the active life while Mary represents the contemplative life (so Origen); the contemplative life is the “better portion.”

C. For some women’s historians, Mary and Martha represent a missionary couple, such as those mentioned in Rom. 16; “sisters,” like “brothers,” can be metaphorical rather than biological.

Suggested Reading:


Questions to Consider:
1. In addition to their likely historical characterizations, what symbolic or instructive value do the sisters serve?
2. Why are Mary, Martha, and Lazarus followers of Jesus? Why do they not appear in Acts, and what about him do they believe?
3. How are the Lucan and Johannine portraits of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus the same, how are they different, and what are the implications for history and aesthetic appreciation of your answers?
Lecture Eight
“Doubting” Thomas

Scope: “Doubting Thomas” is a familiar phrase, but the detailed and complex story of Thomas the disciple is less so. In this lecture, we explore Thomas’s limited role in the synoptic tradition, his casting in John’s Gospel as doubter of Jesus’ physical resurrection and as foil to Mary Magdalene, and his extensive career in the post-canonical tradition. We will pay particular attention to three ancient texts that are receiving today substantial attention by both scholarly and popular readers: the Coptic Gospel of Thomas from the collection of Gnostic materials found at Nag Hammadi (often considered to contain direct quotes from Jesus), the Infancy Gospel of Thomas (which depicts Jesus as a frankly quite frightening toddler), and the Acts of Thomas, an apocryphal novel that depicts the Apostle’s adventures as he evangelizes South Asia. Our discussion will also address Thomas’s association with ascetic forms of Christianity and the reasons that many in the early church considered him to be Jesus’ twin brother.

Outline

I. The name “Thomas” is actually a nickname, meaning “twin” in Aramaic. He is sometimes identified as “Didymus,” which means “twin” in Greek. His given name is Judas.
   A. He may be associated with both Old Testament twins (Jacob and Esau; Perez and Zerah) and Greek mythological twins (Castor and Pollux).
   B. In some later church speculation, Thomas is Jesus’ (human) twin brother.
   C. For “Gnostic” texts, perhaps Thomas indicates that anyone can become a “twin” of Jesus.

II. Thomas, for the author of John, appears to represent a rival theological and ecclesial school (much as Peter does, as we have seen in his relationship to the Beloved Disciple).
A. Thomistic Christianity is represented by the Gospel of Thomas.
   1. The Gospel of Thomas, discovered in Nag Hammadi in 1945, is a collection of 114 sayings (logia) and purports to be “the secret words which the living Jesus spoke and Didymus Judas Thomas wrote down.”
      a. For many scholars of Christian origins, it preserves “historical” Jesus material.
      b. For others, it is a later text dependent on the canonical Gospels.
   2. The text, a Coptic translation of a Greek original (and likely of Syrian origins), contains no miracles, passion, or resurrection story or even any narrative flow.
   3. The listing of logia resembles what the “Q” source—if it existed—would have looked like. For Thomas, what Jesus says, rather than what he does, has salvific value.
   4. Although the text is often classified as “Gnostic,” scholars today question both the helpfulness and applicability of the label.

B. For the Gospel of Thomas, Thomas, rather than Peter, offers the correct christological confession. When Jesus says to the disciples, “Compare me to someone and tell whom I am like” (logion 13), Peter responds, “You are like a righteous angel”; Matthew offers “a wise philosopher”; and Thomas insists, “Master, my mouth is incapable of saying whom you are like.”
   1. Jesus corrects Thomas by saying, “I am not your master.”
   2. “He took him and drew him aside and spoke three words to him.” When his companions ask him what Jesus has said, Thomas replies, “If I tell you one of the words which he spoke to me, you will pick up stones and throw them at me. And fire will come out from the stones and burn you up.”

C. Thomistic Christianity insists that each individual has a divine spark such that each can function as, and represent, the divine. Conversely, John insists that salvation is only through the Christ.
   1. Logion 67 observes that the understanding of the self is the superior form of knowledge.
   2. Logion 19 insists that the self is preexistent; John insists that the Logos alone is preexistent.
3. *Logion 75* speaks of the self who enters the “bridal chamber,” whereas in John’s Gospel, only Jesus is the bridegroom.

D. Thomistic Christianity proclaims a *docetic* (that is, Jesus only “appears” to be human) Christ. Conversely, John insists that the Word became “flesh.”

E. According to the *Gospel of Thomas’s* final saying (114), Jesus states that Mary Magdalene is to be “made male” and, thus, be like the male Apostles; the Gospel of John insists that she, and the other female characters, are women (*gyne*).

III. “Doubting Thomas” is a figure only in the Johannine tradition.

A. Thomas is named in the synoptic lists of the Twelve (Matt. 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; and see Acts 1:13) but plays no specific role. In John, Thomas appears four times (11:16; 14:5; 20:24; 21:2), and only here does he receive an independent characterization.

B. In 11:16, Thomas states to the other disciples, “Let us also go [to Lazarus], that we may die with him.” The statement is ambiguous: Is he encouraging or incredulous?

C. In 14:5, he reveals his ignorance: “We do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” Jesus then insists that “I am the way. … If you know me, you will know my Father also.”

D. In 20:24–29, Thomas is first absent when Jesus appears to the “brothers,” then expresses his refusal to believe unless he both sees and touches the risen Lord. Jesus appears before Thomas and invites him to place his finger in his wounds. Thomas responds, “My Lord and my God” (v. 29).

1. Matt. 28:16 acknowledges that some among the Eleven doubted even upon seeing the risen Jesus.

2. In the later *Epistula Apostolorum*, the risen Jesus tells Peter to “lay your hand in the nail-prints of my hands”; Thomas, to touch his side; and Andrew, to see if his footsteps leave a mark.

E. In 21:10–14, Thomas is among the smaller group of disciples that encounters the risen Christ.

IV. The ascription of the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, perhaps of Syriac origins, may go back to Origen (Hom. 1 on Luke), but it is not clear
Origen knew the text currently under investigation. One tradition, from Athens, associates the infancy materials with James.

A. The Greek text opens with the superscription “The account of Thomas the Israelite concerning the childhood of the Lord,” and the address is to “brothers from among the Gentiles.”

B. Because “the Israelite” is not otherwise used for the Apostle, this author may be a different “Thomas.”

V. The Acts of Thomas, probably originating in Edessa, in Syria (third century), depicts Thomas as Jesus’ twin who bears a similar appearance. He is commissioned by lot to evangelize India. Today, “Thomas Christians” in India trace their origins to this missionary journey.

A. The genre of Apocryphal Acts is a form of Christian midrash that fills in the gaps left by the canon: what happened to the Twelve, what do we know of Mary’s childhood, and so on.

B. The Apocryphal Acts typically combine adventure, travel, and miraculous escapes from persecution with a focus on asceticism; many of the characters are women who struggle to preserve their chastity.

C. Thomas appears as a reluctant Apostle who first demurs, “saying he was not able to travel on account of the weakness of his body,” then asking, “How can I, being a Hebrew, go among the Indians to proclaim the truth?” When Jesus appears to him, Thomas still demurs.

1. Jesus appears to Abban, an Indian merchant in Jerusalem, who had been commissioned by King Gundaphorus to purchase a carpenter, and sells Thomas to him.
2. When Abban asks Thomas if Jesus is in fact his master, Thomas concedes.

D. Thomas is recognized by a Hebrew flute-girl, who finds him “beautiful in appearance” beyond all who attended the wedding of the king’s daughter.

1. In the bridal chamber, the groom sees “the Lord talking with the bride. He had the appearance of Judas Thomas, the Apostle, who shortly before had blessed them and departed … and the Lord said to him, ‘I am not Judas Thomas, I am his brother.’”

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2. Bride and groom are convinced by Jesus not to engage in “filthy intercourse.”

E. Thomas resurrects a young woman killed by her fiancé: “As I loved her very much, I entreated her and tried to persuade her to live with me in chaste and pure conduct, as you teach. And she would not. Since she would not, I took a sword and killed her.”

F. Eventually, Thomas was martyred by being pierced with spears. He was buried in India, but a follower removed the body and brought it to Mesopotamia. The original sepulchre became a place of healing.

VI. Additional Thomas materials.

A. The Apocalypse of Thomas, with manuscript attestation from a fifth-century palimpsest in Vienna, is typical of the genre and adds nothing to the characterization of Thomas.

B. In the Book of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ by Bartholomew the Apostle (probably fifth century), Thomas’s absence from the first Resurrection appearance is explained: He had departed to his city, hearing that his son Siophanes (Theophanes?) was dead.

1. Thomas goes to the tomb; raises his son; brings him to the city, where he tells his story; then baptizes 12,000 people. Thomas establishes the church and makes his son the bishop.

2. “Thomas mounted on a cloud, and it took him to the Mount of Olives and to the Apostles, who told him of the visit of Jesus, and he would not believe. Bartholomew admonished him.” Then Jesus appears and Thomas touches his wounds.

C. The Book of Thomas the Contender, also a Syrian product preserved in Coptic, has Jesus identify Thomas as follows, “Since you are my twin and my true companion, examine yourself, and learn who you are … Since you will be called my [twin] … although you do not know it yet … you will be called ‘the one who knows himself.’”

Suggested Reading:


**Questions to Consider:**

1. If the Gospel of Thomas were included in the canon, how would we understand Jesus or the other Gospels differently?

2. Are the Apocryphal Acts of any theological value? Are they comparable to “Bible movies”? Should Christian midrash be encouraged?

3. How might one distinguish among Petrine, Johannine, and “Thomasine” Christianities? Are they of equal value? Are they all manifested today?
Lecture Nine
The Gentile Mother

Scope: Of the many miracles Jesus performs, this exorcism of a demon-possessed child may be the most problematic. Only here does Jesus emphatically refuse to heal; only here does a person’s insistence reverse his resistance; this is one of the few instances in which the healing is done at a distance; and the request for the healing is made by a mother, not a father, and by a Gentile, not a Jew. Adding yet another layer of complexity, although the same story, Mark’s account of a “Syro-Phoenician woman” and Matthew’s “Canaanite” offer differing dialogues and convey different symbolic resonances. This lecture attempts to sort out these problems to determine what Jesus might have done; why he did so; why of all the miracles he performed, this particular story was preserved; and how Mark and Matthew’s original readers might have understood the account. Throughout, we discover information about the relationship between Jesus’ home in the Galilee and the territories of Tyre and Sidon, the presence of other “Canaanite” women in the Gospel tradition, and even intriguing parallels to this story in both Roman and Jewish sources.

Outline

I. The determined mother of Matt. 15:21–28 (called Canaanite) and Mark 7:24–30 (called “a Greek, Syro-Phoenician by birth”), requests Jesus’ healing of her demon-possessed daughter, but unlike in the majority of such scenarios, Jesus (initially) refuses her. The story is absent from Luke and John.

II. The setting moves Jesus from emphasis on male Jewish leaders in Jewish environs to a female supplicant in the “region of Tyre and Sidon” (Matt. 15:21).

A. The former Phoenicia became incorporated into the Roman province of Syria. Tyre encompassed the tribal areas of Asher, Dan, and Naphtali. The area retained some Jewish presence, although the setting connotes Gentile territory (cf. Matt. 8:28–34, where Jesus enters Gadara).
B. Does Jesus actually enter Gentile territory? In Matthew’s story, the woman “comes out” to him; thus, the meeting appears to be at the border. In Mark, Jesus withdraws into a house, although “he could not escape notice” (7:24b).

III. Matthew (15:21) calls the woman a “Canaanite”; Mark (7:26) calls her a “Greek, a Syro-Phoenician by birth.”

A. The Canaanites were the indigenous population (supposedly) destroyed by Joshua because of their “false gods”; they remained in the land, as Judges indicates.

1. Matthew’s genealogy includes at least one other “Canaanite woman”: Rahab, the prostitute from Jericho (Jdg. 2, 6). Tamar (Gen. 38) may also have been a Canaanite.

2. For Matthew, the Canaanite woman, like the centurion of chapter 8, anticipates the Gentile mission forbidden in the “mission discourse” of 10:5b–6 (see 15:24) and promoted in the “great commission” of 28:16–20.

3. Mark’s expression may suggest an upper-class status; if so, Jesus the Galilean Jew represents the group exploited by the Tyrian and Sidonian population centers; further, his reluctance to heal the woman’s daughter becomes more easily understandable.

4. Church tradition (e.g., Hilary) regarded the woman as the archetypal Gentile whom Jesus welcomes into his community.

B. Neither Gospel mentions the woman’s husband: Was she a single mother, widowed, divorced?

1. As a single woman, she is comparable to other women who follow Jesus (such as the woman at the cross and tomb, the Samaritan woman in John, and Mary and Martha in Luke and John).

2. She is comparable to the various “fathers” (e.g., Jairus, the centurion) who seek Jesus’ healing ability.

3. The model of a mother who seeks a healing is established by Jereboam’s wife, who approaches Ahijah (1 Kings 14:1–14), and the Great Woman of Shunem, who approaches Elisha (2 Kings 4:18–37).

C. Church tradition has named the Canaanite woman “Justa.”
IV. The daughter, also unnamed, is a mere cipher.

A. In Mark, the woman finds “the child lying on the bed, and the
demon gone.” In Matthew, whether the daughter is present or
absent throughout the dialogue is never made clear.

B. According to Mark, the daughter is possessed by an “unclean
spirit”; in Matthew, she is “severely demon-possessed.” Mark,
having just announced that Jesus “declared all foods clean” (7:19),
continues the theme of purity; Matthew emphasizes the severity of
the possession.

C. The daughter may be compared to other children in the Gospel
tradition, such as the centurion’s son (or slave), Jairus’s daughter,
Herodias’s daughter, and so on.

V. In Matt. 15:22, the woman cries (in direct discourse), “Have mercy on
me, Lord, son of David, my daughter is severely demon-possessed.”
The Marcan narrator announces that the woman “begged [Jesus] to cast
the demon out of her daughter.” In both cases, Jesus rebuffs the
request.

A. In Matthew, “he did not answer her at all.” Then, the disciples
urge him, “Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.”

1. Early church tradition tended to read “send her away” as “free
her,” or “do what she asks.” This interpretation promoted the
view of the disciples as intercessors; Luther read the story as
demonstrating that intercessory prayer was unnecessary.

2. Do the disciples promote the healing or fail in showing any
mercy?

B. Jesus responds (to them?) in an echo of Matt. 10:5b, “I was sent
only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Matthew consistently
depicts the people of Israel as the ones to whom the messiah
comes; the time of the Gentiles can only follow the Resurrection
(see the comparable reluctance to perform a Gentile healing in
Matt. 8:5–13).

C. Matthew heightens the woman’s sympathetic characteristics: She
calls Jesus “Lord” (Kyrie) three times, she hails him as “Son of
David,” she kneels (worships). The titles may indicate that she
sees him as something more than a local healer.

1. “Lord, help me” is a Psalmic formulation (Pss. 6:3; 9:14; 26:7,
and so on).
2. When the woman then kneels before Jesus and implores, “Lord, help me,” he answers, “It is not good to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.”

D. Whether the woman is abject or not and whether Jesus is testing her, testing the disciples, or testing his own sense of mission remain debated questions.

E. In Mark, he responds, “Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.” The temporal division foreshadows the eventual Gentile mission, later confirmed by the feeding of the 4,000 (Mark 8:1–10).

1. Arguments that “puppy” (kynarion), the term Matthew uses, is a term of endearment are unhelpful.

2. “Dogs” was not a common insult for Gentiles, as many modern secondary sources insist. It was a standard ancient insult found in the works of Aristotle, Euripides, Quintillian, and others. Matt. 7:6 advises against throwing what is holy to dogs, even as one should not throw pearls before swine.

3. In Phil. 4, Paul calls those who circumcise “dogs”; St. John Chrysostom notes that the “Jews who kill the prophets” are dogs; and St. Jerome states that Jews were the children and Gentiles, the dogs, until the coming of Jesus, when the roles became reversed.

4. There is no need to find a connection to “Cynics” in the woman’s rhetorical ploys.

5. For many conservative readers, Jesus spoke “with a smile on his lips and a twinkle in his eye.”

VI. In Mark, the woman responds, “Lord, even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs”; in Matthew, she states, “Yes Lord, and even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the table of their masters.”

A. Mark’s “children” is less politically difficult than Matthew’s “masters.”

B. Augustine found the woman’s humility a virtue; as his Sermo 77.11 records, “The Lord called her a dog. She did not say, I am not a dog, but she said, ‘I am one.’”

C. Medieval Catholic interpreters, such as Albertus Magnus, saw her as epitomizing masculine virtues; Protestant writers saw her humility as epitomizing the feminine soul.
D. Allegorical interpretations were also common, such as Theodore of Mopsuestia’s proposal that the bread is Christian doctrine and the table is Scripture.

VII. Mark’s Jesus responds, “For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter”; in Matthew, he exclaims, “Woman, great is your faith. Let it be done for you as you wish.”

A. Given parallel accounts, is this a story of Jesus’ “meekness”? For example, Macrobius records (Saturnalia 2.4.27) how an old soldier who found himself in danger of losing a law case publicly requests from Augustus that he would appear for him in court. Augustus chooses an attendant to act as counsel, but the soldier, stripping his sleeve and showing his scars, shouts, “When you were in danger at Actium, I didn’t look for a substitute but I fought for you in person.” The Emperor blushed, and fearing to be thought both haughty and ungrateful, appeared in court on the man’s behalf.”

B. Dio’s Roman History (69.6.3) offers a female protagonist who makes a request of Hadrian. At first, the emperor responds, “I haven’t time.” The woman then cries out, “Cease, then, being the Emperor,” and he then grants her a hearing. Dio explains, “This is a kind of preface, of a summary nature, that I have been given in regard to his character.”

C. Rabbi Judah the Prince (B. Baba Batra 8a) also must change his mind and provide for those in need; as R. Jonathan B. Amran puts it, “Give me food, for even a dog and a raven are given food.”

Suggested Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. Would the story convey a different impression if the woman were male? Jewish? If the child were a son? A slave?
2. To what extent does religious apologetic influence biblical interpretation? To what extent should it?

3. What should take priority, the meaning of the text as assessed by the evangelists’ original audiences or contemporary interpretations (feminist, post-colonial, liberationist, and so on) stemming from today’s social concerns?
Lecture Ten
The Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son

Scope: Figures in parables often become more “real” to readers than historical persons, which is the case with the Good Samaritan and Prodigal Son. Indeed, for some commentators, the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son are understood to represent real people, from Jesus himself (who rescues from death; who ventures into a far country [the world] and returns to be glorified by his Father) to the ideal Christian (who is neighbor to all; who is forgiven by grace). This lecture begins by examining how Luke’s audience (Luke is the only Gospel containing these parables) would have understood the Samaritan and Prodigal. Our variables for assessing the first character include Jewish-Samaritan relationships, priests and Levites, brigands and innkeepers, and the role of the “righteous alien.” For the second character, we investigate antecedent biblical stories of rival sons, patterns of inheritance, and honor and shame dynamics. We then travel through several interpretive strategies, from the early church’s allegories to Reformation moralizing to post-Enlightenment theological, psychological, and literary readings of the Samaritan and Prodigal.

Outline

I. History of Samaria.
   A. Following Solomon’s rule, the United Monarchy split into two independent states: Judah in the South, ruled by a Davidic descendant (see 1 Kings 12), and Israel in the North, ruled by a series of dynastic houses.
   B. In c. 720, Assyria conquered Israel (see 2 Kings 17:1–16), dispersed the political and religious elite throughout the empire (hence the “ten lost tribes”), and resettled other peoples in Israel. The combination of indigenous and resettled populations became the Samaritans. The capital, now called a “city” (polis), was rebuilt by Alexander the Great.
   C. The first biblical appearance of “Samaritans” as an organized group is in Neh. 4:2. The enmity there recorded between Samaritan and Judah (later Judea) continues. Samaria was
destroyed by the king of Judah, John Hyrcanus, around 108/107, then rebuilt (and renamed Sebaste) by Herod the Great about 30 B.C.E. Between 6 to 9 C.E., Samaritans were active in harassing Jewish pilgrims.

II. The New Testament offers a somewhat ambivalent portrait of Samaria.
   A. Matt. 10:5b, Jesus’ first missionary rule, reads: “enter no town of the Samaritans.”
   D. In Luke 17:11–19, a Samaritan leper returns to thank Jesus for healing.
   E. In Acts 8, Samaria is beguiled by Simon Magus, converted by Philip, and receives the Holy Spirit from John and Peter.

   A. The context concerns a lawyer who tests Jesus by inquiring about eternal life.
   B. To Jesus’ probe as to what the Law says, the man correctly responds by citing Deut. 6:4–5 (LXX) and Lev. 19:18 (see Matt. 22:37 and Mark 12:30 on the “Great Commandment”). “Wanting to justify himself,” the man then asks, “Who is my neighbor?”

IV. The plot.
   A. “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead” (Luke 10:30).
      1. Some commentators regard the brigands as freedom fighters or “roving terrorists,” dispossessed by Roman collaborators who exploited the poor.
      2. Others offer that the man was a trader, and traders were normally viewed as dishonest; thus, the man may not have evoked an early hearer’s sympathy.
      3. The man’s identity—class, ethnic group, age, and so on—is unimportant to the story.
B. “Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side” (10:31–32).

1. The major divisions of the Jewish population were priests (cohanim), Levites, and Israelites. Although some scholars claim the first two men sought to avoid corpse contamination, Luke offers no excuse. Jewish law requires that one do anything to save a life.

2. Jewish readers would be prepared to have the third person, an Israelite, be the hero.

C. “But a Samaritan while traveling came near to him; and when he saw him, was he moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he gave the innkeeper two denarii [a denarius is about a day’s wage for a laborer], and said, ‘Take care of him, and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend’” (10:33–35).

1. Inns are typically seen as sites to be avoided by “decent people.”

2. The Samaritan writes the innkeeper a blank check. His behavior is supererogatory.

V. The outcome.

A. When Jesus asks, “Which of these three do you think proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” the lawyer replies, “The one who showed mercy on him.”

1. The original question was “Who is my neighbor?” not “Who proved neighbor?”

2. The lawyer is unable even to voice the hated name, Samaritan. He can only say, “The one doing mercy upon him.”

B. Most commentators propose that the parable is designed to show that “outcasts”—lepers, Samaritans, the sick, women, “sinners,” toll-collectors, children, Gentiles, and others—are welcomed by Jesus. This view is facile and naïve and often anti-Jewish. The point is not “outcast” but bitter enemy.
C. Allegorical readings often regard the man in the ditch as the sinner; the priest and Levite, as the Law and the Prophets; the Samaritan, as Jesus; and so on.

D. For many Western readers today, the Samaritan is the person against whom prejudice exists: homosexuals, Asian or Hispanic immigrants, Moslems or Arabs. The U.S. Civil War and Northern Ireland’s “Troubles” are closer models.

VI. The parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11–32).

A. Perhaps the story would be better called the parable of the “Father and Two Sons,” of the “Older Brother,” or even of the “Absent Mother.”

B. “There was a man who had two sons,” recalls Cain and Abel, Ishmael and Isaac, Esau and Jacob. For well-to-do families, only two sons would have been unexpected and, thus, would have reinforced the recollection of the other stories about two brothers.

VII. The plot, part I.

A. The younger son asks his father for his share of the inheritance, and the father “divided his property between them.” The request is a presumptuous insult to the father (see Sir. 33:20–24) and unfair dealing with the elder brother, while the father’s response is neither good parenting nor good business.

B. The younger son travels to “a distant land,” squanders his property in “dissolute living,” faces famine, and in his desperation, hires himself out to a local who sends him to feed the pigs. The younger son would “gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.”

C. “When he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough to spare, but here I am dying of hunger? I will get up and go to my father and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.”’"

1. The son is traditionally regarded as manifesting repentance, faith, and humility. The repeated anastas (“rise up”) in 18 and 20 may suggest a return to life.
2. Might his primary motive be his lack of food, rather than theological truth (Lev. Rabbah 13.4 on Lev. 11.2 reads, “When Israelites are reduced to eating carob pods, they repent”)?

D. The son begins to state, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son. …”

E. The father’s response—running to greet his son, calling for a fatted calf, providing a ring and other accoutrements of status—more than restores the son’s position. His overabundant generosity resembles the response of the Samaritan to the traveler (10:33).

VIII. The plot, part II.

A. Unlike the shepherd and the woman, the father did not call his son to join the festivities.

B. When the father does come, the older son states, “Listen, for all these years I have been working like a slave for you and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. …”

1. Has the older son actually become a “slave,” and what would the slaves think?

2. Is he selfish and hypocritical, entirely justified, or completely insecure?

3. Does his fidelity appear less desirable than the younger son’s picaresque adventure?

C. “Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. We had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found” (15:32).

1. If all the father owns belongs to the older son, what will become of his brother?

2. If the older brother owns all, is the traditional allegory disrupted?

IX. Interpretations.

A. Although the younger son is often regarded as the repentant (Gentile) Christian and the older, as the self-righteous hypocritical Jew, the parable subverts such classifications.
B. The parable may be interpreted in light of the juxtaposed parables of the Lost Sheep and Lost Coin.
1. This juxtaposition suggests that our parable is about something more, or other than, repenting (contra 15:10) because neither sheep nor coins repent. The focus of the first two parables is on the search for the lost.
2. As the parables move from 100 to 10 to 1, the reader’s attention is drawn to the younger son and, hence, away from his brother.

C. Modern classifications offer alternative lenses. In one reading, the younger son corresponds to Freud’s id; the elder brother, to the superego; and the father, to the ego, with the father’s excessive generosity masking hostility and the elder brother’s resentment of his brother displaced onto the father.

Suggested Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. Given current concerns with globalization, has the definition of “neighbor” changed?
2. If the parables are read without allegory, do they reveal moral lessons?
3. What would family counselors advise the Prodigal’s family?
Lecture Eleven
The Samaritan Woman

Scope: The previous lecture introduced the Samaritans, and this talk takes a close look at one particular Samaritan. She is the unnamed woman of John 4, with whom Jesus has a conversation about “living water,” appropriate worship, and messianic identity. We will explore the various ways in which the Samaritan woman has been interpreted, including: her contrast to the major character of John 3, Nicodemus the Pharisee (who misunderstands Jesus’ call to be “born again”); her relationship to other “women at the well” (e.g., Rebecca [Genesis 24], Rachel [Genesis 29], and Zipporah [Exodus 2]) and the Fourth Gospel’s use of the literary convention known as the “type scene”; charges against her of sexual impropriety, intellectual obtuseness, and false religion; the symbolic interpretations accorded to her five husbands and current living companion; and her roles as evangelist and church leader. Throughout, we will observe the ways in which John also explores the character of Jesus through extended dialogue.

Outline

I. John’s approach to the Samaritans.
   A. “Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship” (4:20). From Sychar, she could have simply pointed to the mountain.
   B. The Gospel uses “the Jews” usually to refer to the enemies of Jesus; in this pericope, Jesus states, “Salvation is from the Jew.” The Gospel follows the Jewish, rather than the Samaritan, textual tradition, and it finds Zion, rather than Mt. Gerizim, the correct locus of worship, but it seeks to surpass both Jewish and Samaritan beliefs and practices: “The time is coming when people will worship neither in Jerusalem nor on Mt. Gerizim, but in spirit and truth.”
   C. The story of the Samaritan woman may be read as a correction or an alternative to Matthew’s Gospel, in which Jesus restricts his followers from entering Samaria, and to Luke’s writings, in which
Samaria is evangelized only after Jesus’ ascension. John’s choice of evangelist may indicate an ambivalence about Samaria.

D. Samaritans awaited a messianic figure and some became believers in Jesus. The woman indicates this belief in her comment about the “Messiah, he who is called Christ,” who “is coming, and when he comes, he will show us all things” (4:25). Pontius Pilate was removed from office for ordering the massacre of thousands of Samaritans who followed the “Samaritan prophet” (so Josephus).

E. The pericope opens with the notice that Jesus “left Judea and departed again to the Galilee. And it was necessary [dei] that he pass through Samaria.” The necessity may be evangelical, rather than geographical.

F. The location is “a city of Samaria, called Sychar, near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob’s well was there.” The reference to the well is John’s lagniappe to the “woman at the well” type scene.

G. John repeats the literary convention, or type scene, in depicting a man and a woman at a well. The convention hints that the couple will discuss marriage and that the consummation will follow a feast. Other examples of the convention include Gen. 24 (Rebecca and Abraham’s servant), Gen. 29 (Rachel and Jacob), and Exod. 2 (Zipporah and Moses).

1. John’s Gospel anticipates this convention by locating Jesus at a wedding (John 2; his statement that his “hour had not yet come” hints at the *hora gamos*, the “hour of marriage”) and describing him as a “bridegroom” (3:29).

2. The Johannine scene parodies the convention. For example, rather than provide him water, the Samaritan woman’s first words are, “How is it that you, a Jew, are asking a drink from me, a woman from Samaria?” The couple is highly unlikely.

II. The Samaritan woman is female, alien, unnamed; she meets Jesus at noon, and she maintains open communication with fellow Samaritans. These characteristics contrast those of Jesus’ main interlocutor in the previous chapter, “a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, [who] came to Jesus by night” (3:1–2a).

A. To Nicodemus, Jesus states, “Amen, Amen, I say to you, unless one is born *anothen*, he cannot see the Kingdom of God” (3:3). Translating *anothen* as “again,” Nicodemus questions, “can a man
be born when he is old; can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb?” For Johannine theology, anothen means “from above” (as in 3:4).

**B.** Jesus questions Nicodemus, “Are you a teacher in Israel, and yet you do not understand this?” (3:10); the woman becomes a teacher in Samaria.

**C.** The Samaritan woman will also face a comment that functions on both literal and spiritual levels, and she comes to an understanding. It is not clear that Nicodemus, even though he accompanies Joseph of Arimathea in entombing Jesus, ever does.

**III.** The “woman” (gyne) at the well.

**A.** We first meet the stranger from another location who, tired and thirsty, “sat down beside the well” (4:6); his situation mirrors that of Moses (Exod. 2:15).

**B.** When “a woman from the Samaritans” comes to draw water, Jesus demands, “Give me to drink” (4:7). This scene foreshadows the Johannine Crucifixion, in which Jesus exclaims, “I thirst” (19:28); symbolically, Jesus “thirsts” to convey his good news.

**C.** Some scholars propose that the woman’s coming to the well at noon (“the sixth hour”), alone, indicates that she is shunned by the other women of the town, who would normally draw water at dusk or in the early morning. Although this interpretation is possible, John does not indicate the woman is shunned; the timing enhances her contrast to Nicodemus. Her lack of a name also keeps the emphasis on her gender and ethnicity.

**IV.** “Living water.”

**A.** Jesus tells the woman that “if you knew who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water” (4:10).

**B.** The woman initially misunderstands: She asks Jesus where he would get such water given his lack of bucket and the depth of the well. But she also includes a theological note: “You’re not greater than our father Jacob, who gave us this well, are you?”

1. The phrasing reappears in 8:53, where “the Jews” ask Jesus, “You’re not greater than our father Abraham, are you?”
2. The woman’s questioning signals not intellectual obtuseness, but a proper response.

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C. “Living water” also indicates “running water”; the Samaritan needs to make the shift from the physical to the spiritual (4:14; see also Jer. 2:13; 17:13).

D. The woman then echoes Jesus’ words: “Give me [dos moi] this water” (4:15). The type scene is reversed because, here, the man gives drink to the woman. Readers might also make the shift to the metaphorical because such terms as well, fountain, spring, and even living water can also convey sexual innuendo (see Prov. 5:15–18; Cant. 4:12).

V. Whether the woman understands living water or not, Jesus changes the subject by asking the woman to “go and call your husband.” When the woman responds, “I have no husband [andra],” Jesus observes (17b–18), “You have had five andras [men; that is, lovers? husbands?] and now you have one who is not your man [that is, husband].”

A. Are the husbands symbolic of the five Samaritan gods, or do they represent the five Books of Moses (which make up the Samaritan Pentateuch)?

B. Is the woman a “five-time loser”? An archetypal sinner?

C. It is not necessary to judge her negatively: She may have been in a Levirate situation (see Mark 12:18–23), widowed, divorced. No one in the text mentions a negative judgment. To take her situation as both negative and literal may be to read without understanding, as Nicodemus does.

D. For John’s readers, the continuing play on the type scene would have been evident.

VI. The woman slowly comes to theological understanding.

A. First, she acknowledges that Jesus is a “prophet” (4:19).

B. Then, perceiving him to be an expert in religious practice, she inquires about the appropriate locus of worship.

C. Next, she provides an apt definition of the messiah: He will show us all things.

D. Jesus responds, “I am [he]” (ego eimi, see Exod. 3).

VII. Interlude: The disciples, returning from obtaining food, are shocked to find Jesus conversing with a woman (4:26) but do not dare to question him.
A. Contrary to popular opinion, “rabbis” were not forbidden from talking to women; the footnote to the RSV reads, “Rabbis avoided speaking to a woman in public.” No one told Martha, the woman taken in adultery, the Samaritan, Mary Magdalene, or Jesus.

B. Jesus tends to speak at greater length with non-Jewish women (for example, the Canaanite), although he has several conversations with Jewish women (for example, Mrs. Zebedee, Martha and Mary, Mary Magdalene, the woman in the crowd [Luke 11:27–28]).

C. This verse, irrelevant to the plot, may reflect tension in the community over women holding theological or evangelistic leadership. The woman shows greater discipleship than the men in that she is willing to question Jesus while the men are afraid to do so.

VIII. Hearing his identification, the woman leaves her jug, announces to the town that Jesus had told her “everything” she ever did (vv. 29, 39) and questions, “Could this be the Christ?”

A. Her questioning need not be seen as negative or obtuse; she is coming to faith. John acknowledges her actions at the end of the pericope by stating, “Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, ‘He told me all that I ever did’” (4:42).

B. Her claim about Jesus’ knowledge belies her action: As evangelist and theologian, she is more than the sum of her marital and sexual experiences.

C. At her word, the Samaritans go out of the city to meet Jesus; thus, her question allows them to judge for themselves (see 20:29). They can therefore state, “It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves …” (4:42a). We might ask whether she is dismissed from the story or whether she recedes, as does John the Baptist.

D. Jesus’ comment to the disciples—in the woman’s absence—confirms her role: He rejects the disciples’ (physical) food even as the woman no longer sought physical water; he speaks of the woman as harvesting for eternal life (31–38). His “food” of “doing the will of him who sent me” represents the convention’s anticipated wedding feast.
E. The Samaritan woman is the only person shown to evangelize an entire community during Jesus’ lifetime. Her success is marked as the people come to see Jesus, then invite him to stay with them two days. The result of her effort is the townspeople’s proclamation, “This is truly the savior of the world” (4:42).

Suggested Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. Does the woman’s sexual history hint at John’s ambivalence about the Samaritans? Does this history create ambivalence toward the woman on our part?
2. Why would Matthew forbid a Samaritan mission, Luke reserve it for Acts, and John depict it?
3. How is the Samaritan woman like and unlike the male disciples? Comparable to the other Johannine women?
Lecture Twelve
Mary Magdalene

Scope: Although famed in Western culture as a repentant prostitute and sometimes seen as Jesus’ lover or even wife, Mary Magdalene appears in the New Testament as none of the above. Before the cross, she is found only once in the Gospel tradition: Luke’s notices that she had been possessed by seven demons but cured by Jesus and that she and other women provided Jesus financial support. In all four Gospels, she is present at the cross, and she is the sole consistent witness to the empty tomb. This lecture investigates what we might know of Mary’s background in the town of Migdal (Tarichaea), how her demonic possession might have been viewed in antiquity, and her presence at the cross and tomb. We also address her extended conversation with the resurrected Jesus in which, according to the Gospel of John, she is commissioned to be the “apostle to the apostles.” We turn finally to the development of her legend: the transformation of faithful follower into debauched prostitute (and, hence, a foil to the Virgin Mary), lover, and wife.

Outline

I. Mary’s name and her home.
   A. Mary (variants: Mariamme, Mariamne, Mariam, Maria, and so on) recollects Miriam, sister of Moses and Aaron, a leader of Israel’s Exodus and wilderness generation (see Exod. 15 for her “Song of the Sea”).
      1. The name was popular in the first century (and in the New Testament); its popularity was enhanced by Mariamme I, the Hasmonean wife of Herod the Great.
      2. The etymology is unclear: desired child, unruly child, stout?
   B. Magdal (Aramaic) or Midgal (Hebrew), meaning “tower,” was a major site for fish processing on the west of the Sea of Galilee, north of Tiberias. In Greek, the city is called Tarichaea (“salted fish”). Josephus, military commander there at the outbreak of the first revolt, calls it a “city” (polis). Its Hellenization included a hippodrome.
C. Along with (perhaps) Judas Iscariot, Mary of Magdala is the only companion of Jesus identified by location. Was she unmarried (unmarriageable because of demon-possession?), divorced, widowed, emancipated? Did she abandon her family?

D. Perhaps she was part of the business world of the male disciples: Magdala is about six miles from Peter’s home in Capernaum.

   A. Luke introduces a number of women whom Jesus cured and who then followed him and supported him “out of their means.” In addition to Joanna, the wife of Herod’s steward Chuza, and Susanna, among them is “Mary Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone forth” (v. 2; see Mark 16:9). (The demons become associated with the deadly sins: pride, avarice, gluttony, lust, jealousy, laziness, and anger.)
   B. The women support Jesus; the term for serving him is diakonein, which may indicate a formal ministerial role.

III. Mary appears in all four Crucifixion scenes (Mark 15:40; Matt. 27:56; Luke 23:49; John 19:25), and in all the lists, her name is given first.
   A. In John, she is with Jesus’ mother (with whom she traveled from the Galilee), her sister, and Mary of Clopas (19:25). However, Jesus does not speak to her from the cross.
   B. Some interpreters see Mary Magdalene as John’s “Beloved Disciple.”

IV. Mary is the only woman to appear in all four Resurrection scenes (accompanied in the synoptics; alone in John). In each, she is commissioned to evangelize.
   A. Mark’s scene is ironic: Mary comes to anoint the body, but she is too late (see Mark 14:8).
      1. The later ending of Mark (second century) adds (16:9), “Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had exorcised seven demons.”
      2. But v. 8, the original ending, depicts Mary and the other women fleeing the tomb for fear.
   B. Mary’s depiction is historically credible in Matthew: She comes to “watch” the tomb. She and the others experience an angelophany,
run to report the Resurrection and are greeted by Jesus (28:9–10), and receive a second commission.

C. Her role is marginalized by Luke’s foregrounding the male disciples.

D. She is absent from Paul’s list in 1 Corinthians 15.

V. The Johannine garden.

A. In John, there is only one woman at the tomb, not three.

B. Mary runs to Simon Peter and the Beloved Disciple (20:2) to announce: “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” Why speak in the plural?

C. Mary sees “two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus has lain, one at the head and one at the feet” (John 20:12). They ask: “Why do you weep?” Then Jesus asks “whom do you seek?” (John 20:15; see 1:37–38).

D. Mary supposes Jesus to be the gardener, but when he calls her by name (see 10:3–4), she recognizes him.

E. Mary clings to Jesus. His response is “do not keep clinging”; “Nole me tangere,” the Latin of 20:17, misses the Greek nuance.

1. The garden reference suggests Eden; according to Ambrose and Augustine, given that woman was the source of sin (auctor culpae), she first receives the cure.

2. The garden recalls Canticles (see Cant. 3:1–4), and Mary comes to symbolize the lover (the church, the soul) who searches for her “bridegroom.”

3. “Do not keep clinging” contrasts Mary to Thomas, whom Jesus invites to touch.

F. Mary is commissioned as “apostle to the apostles.”

VI. Orthodoxy and heresy.

A. The Acts of Philip 77 has Mary ask on Philip’s behalf for a better mission area. Jesus replies: “Behold, Philip, the mind of a woman has befallen him, whereas in you a manly and brave mind dwells.” Mary is advised to dress like a man and accompany Philip.

B. In the Coptic Gospel of Thomas (second century?), Peter demands, “Let Mary depart from us, for women are not worthy of life.” See also the Pistis Sophia, wherein Mary complains to Jesus, “Each time I come forward to give the correct interpretation of your
words, I am afraid of Peter, for he threatens me and hates our sex.” The Gospel of Mary has Peter state, “Surely he did not speak with a woman, without our knowledge and not openly? Are we to turn about and all listen to her?”

C. In Thomas, Jesus responds: “Look, I will lead her that I may make her male, in order that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every woman who makes herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven.” The point is ideal androgyny, as “Adam” before separation into male and female (see Gal. 3:28). Women achieve this status through radical asceticism.

D. The Gospel of Philip (third century?) describes Mary as “His companion” (either “life companion” or “companion in intercourse”), “sister,” “mother,” and “friend”; it also states, “Jesus loved Mary more than the other disciples [so, also, the Gospel of Mary], embraced her, and kissed her on the mouth.”

E. This material provides fodder for “alternative” Christian origins, such as Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh, and Henry Lincoln’s Holy Blood, Holy Grail and Margaret Starbird’s The Woman with the Alabaster Jar.

VII. The Apostle to the Apostles becomes a penitential prostitute.

A. The image of Mary Magdalene as the sexual penitent begins in the fifth and sixth centuries in the Western church. In the Eastern church, she remains the “ointment bearer.”

B. Pope Gregory the Great (fifth century) associates the Magdalene with Mary of Bethany (and, thus, finds Mary Magdalene the model of the contemplative life), then associates both with Luke 7’s “woman who was a sinner.”

C. Mary sails in a rudderless boat (like Noah’s ark) to Marseilles, converts many, spends thirty years in solitude, and is taken to heaven seven times daily for prayers.

D. She becomes the patron of hairdressers, ointment makers and perfumers, and cosmeticians; she is also associated with vineyard workers, gardeners, apothecaries, glove-makers, hatters, weavers, seamen, prisoners, and the Romani/Sinti people. Vézelay, home of her remains, becomes an important pilgrimage site.

E. Gregory IX creates the “Penitents of Saint Mary Magdalene” in 1227. Other orders follow.
F. She becomes an eroticized image (e.g., Rubens’s *Christ and the Repentant Sinners* [1620, Munich]; Marius Vasselon’s *The Penitent Mary Magdalene* [1887, Tours]; and Nikos Kazantzakis’s *The Last Temptation of Christ*).

**Suggested Reading:**


**Questions to Consider:**

1. Why are there such strong desires on the part of many to depict Mary Magdalene as a prostitute? As Jesus’ lover or wife?
2. Do the Gnostic texts have any historical credibility? How might one tell?
Scope: Members of these two Jewish movements, prominent in the first century, as well as in the Gospel texts, typically serve as foils to, if not enemies of, Jesus and his followers. This lecture introduces the two movements by reconstructing their beliefs and practices on the basis of the New Testament (both the Gospels and Paul, who identifies himself as a Pharisee), the writings of the historian Josephus, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and rabbinic literature. We next turn to the rivalry between these groups and those who followed Jesus of Nazareth to seek both the sources of disagreement between them and the possible explanations for the Gospels’ sometimes strident polemic. We conclude with observations on individual Sadducees and Pharisees, with a particular focus on Paul’s Pharisaic teacher, Gamaliel, who appears in the Acts of the Apostles, and Hillel, often viewed as a Pharisee and seen as proclaiming a message similar to that of Jesus.

Outline

I. Pharisees.
   A. Most definitions are (unfortunately) based on New Testament portraits: "Pharisee: strict in doctrine and ritual, without the spirit of piety, laying stress on the outward show of religion and morality, and assuming superiority on that account; hypocritical, formal, self-righteous."
   
   B. We might be humble when it comes to defining Pharisees; as Joseph Sievers recently put it, "After over two decades of research, there is at least one assured result: we know considerably less about the Pharisees than an earlier generation knew."
   
   C. Our sources are problematic: Rabbinic documents post-date the times of Jesus and Paul; the synoptic Gospels depict Pharisees as negative foils; Josephus is writing apologetic; and the only (undisputed) Pharisee from whom we have written records is Paul of Tarsus.
      1. Paul (Phil. 3:5–6) describes himself as "of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews, as to the Law a
Pharisee, as to zeal a persecutor of the Church, as to righteousness under the Law, blameless.”

2. Josephus (Life 12) states, “Being now in my 19th year, I began to participate in public life, following the party of the Pharisees, which is very close to the one the Greeks call the Stoic school.” Whether he actually joined the party remains debated, especially given that he nowhere earlier records such affiliation.


4. Hillel and Shammai are first called “Pharisees” by Jewish-Christians (Jerome, Comm. on Isa. 8:14); rabbinic sources never identify an individual Pharisee.

5. The Dead Sea Scrolls’ reference to “Seekers after smooth things” may be to Pharisees. Does this mean they kept adapting Torah, that they supported Rome?

D. The name (probably) comes from P-R-Sh, a root meaning, “to separate” and may have been accorded the Pharisees by others.

1. The movement was not an inherited one (like priest or village elder) and, therefore, cut across class status to some extent.

2. Pharisees were primarily householders of the retainer class (see Luke 7:40–44). One was not by profession a Pharisee. They were tent-makers (Paul), educators (Nicodemus), and so on.

E. Josephus (War 2; Ant. 18) describes, with a Hellenistic focus, four parties (hairesies): Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and the “Fourth Philosophy” (comparable to Zealots). He sets the origins of the first three in the context of the reign of Jonathan the high priest (c. 145 B.C.E.).

II. The group changes focus over time, with varying roles in the political sphere.

A. According to Josephus, they were heavily involved in Hasmonean politics, first as the enemy of Janneaus, then as friends of his wife, Salome Alexandra. The queen promoted Pharisees, but her son Aristobolus reversed her preference. Pharisees found themselves empowered under Herod, in part because the Pharisee Pollion advised the people to accept his rule.
B. Josephus (Ant. 13; a parallel in B. Kidd. 66a identifies the king as Alexander Janneaus [105–76]) notes concerning John Hyrcanus (135–104):

… particularly hostile to him were the Pharisees … so great is their influence with the masses that even when they speak against a king or high priest, they immediately gain credence. Hyrcanus too was a disciple of theirs, and was greatly loved by them. Once he invited them to a feast and entertained them hospitably, and when he saw that they were having a very good time, he began by saying that they knew he wished to be righteous and in everything he did tried to please God and them—for the Pharisees profess such beliefs; at the same time, he begged them, if they observed him doing anything wrong or straying from the right path, to lead him back to it and correct him …

One guest does, with bad results.

C. In the Herodian period, they were comparable to a voluntary association. According to Ant. 17.41:

There was also a group of Jews priding itself on its adherence to ancestral customs and claiming to observe the laws of which the Deity approves, and by these men, called Pharisees, the women of the court [of Herod] were ruled. These men were able to help the king greatly because of their foresight, and yet they were obviously intent upon combating and injuring him.

More than 6,000 Pharisees refuse to take an oath of loyalty to Caesar; Herod fines them, and Pheroras’s wife pays the fine.

III. Some scholars today suggest that Jesus opposed the Pharisees because the party was agitating for revolt against Rome. There is precious little evidence for this case.

A. Josephus notes (Ant. 18.4) that a Pharisee named Zadok collaborated with Judas the Galilean to found the “Fourth Philosophy.” Ant. 18.23 states, regarding the Zealots, “Concerning everything else they agree with the opinions of the Pharisees, except that they have an unconquerable passion for liberty.”

B. The Pharisees of the first century show little political interest; Jesus does not condemn the Pharisees for militarism.
C. However, at the time of the revolt against Rome, the Pharisee Simon ben Gamaliel, along with several Pharisaic colleagues, supported the rebels.

IV. Pharisees may be characterized by a distinctive way of living, a strong concern for orthopraxy and orthodoxy, and thus social involvement that promoted revival and reform.

A. Josephus states, “Pharisees had passed on to the people certain regulations handed down from former generations and not recorded in the Laws of Moses” (Ant. 13).

B. Matthew 23 connects them to Scribes, states that they “sit on Moses’ seat” and are correct interpreters of Torah; wear phylacteries (tefillin); are greeted in public; are called “rabbi” (designating “teacher” or “master”); attend banquets; make proselytes (likely the reference is to other Jews); tithe mint, dill, and cumin (and, therefore, more substantive goods); are concerned with the purity; and are synagogue-based.

C. According to Josephus (War 2.162–66; c. 75 C.E.):

The Pharisees are considered the most accurate interpreters of the laws, and hold the position of the leading sect; they attribute everything to Fate and to God; they hold that to act rightly or otherwise rests, indeed, for the most part with men, but that in each action Fate cooperates. Every soul, they maintain, is perishable, but the soul of the good alone passes into another body, while the souls of the wicked suffer eternal punishment. … The Pharisees are affectionate to each other and cultivate harmonious relations with the community.

D. Rabbinic sources suggest that the Pharisees were interested in extending the sanctity of the Temple to the home. To accomplish this, they practiced ritualized eating, insisted that their food be tithed according to scriptural mandate, and sought to live in conformity to the will of heaven. They fasted, and some may have practiced private prayer.

E. How laws and beliefs were to be implemented differed among Pharisaic groups. Rabbinic texts suggest that by the mid-first century, there were divisions in the movement; the most famous of these are the House of Hillel and the House of Shammai.
V. Sadducees.

A. The name of the Sadducees is perhaps derived from Zadok, King David’s high priest. The Sadducees are also associated with the Boethusians, an Alexandrian high-priestly family who gained ascendancy under Herod the Great—perhaps because Herod needed them as a counter to Hasmonean high-priestly claims.

B. The various sources provide the following composite view of the Sadducees: They were predominantly wealthy and aristocratic; therefore, their social interests were, not surprisingly, in preserving the status quo. Their base was Jerusalem and the Temple.

C. They accepted the written but not the oral Law (although they had their own interpretive traditions), denied resurrection, and according to Josephus, “do away with Fate, holding that there is no such thing and that human actions are not achieved in accordance with her decree, but that all things lie within our own power.”

D. In the Gospels, they question Jesus on resurrection, and in Acts, they fight with Pharisees in order for Paul to escape persecution.

E. Josephus (War 2) asserts, “The Sadducees are, even among themselves, rather boorish in their behavior, and in their intercourse with their peers are as rude as to aliens.”

VI. Dialogue and debate with Christianity.

A. Josephus bases the Pharisees in Judea, and little external evidence locates them in the Galilee before 70 C.E. Consequently, many scholars propose that the Gospel controversy stories set in the Galilee may be post-70 retrojections.

B. Even the Gospel polemic suggests admirable qualities about the Pharisees, such as the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Luke 18:9–14).


A. Gamaliel, a Sanhedrin member, “a teacher of the Law, held in honor by all the people,” advises his fellows to leave the followers of Jesus alone, “for if this plan or this undertaking is of men, it will fail, but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God.” Does this make him wise and understanding or, like Nicodemus, ignorant?
B. According to Acts 22:3, Paul was “brought up at the feet of Gamaliel,” but the pre-Christian Paul was a persecutor of the church.

VIII. The quest for the historical Hillel.

A. According to Pirke Avot:
1. “Hillel said, ‘Be of the disciples of Aaron, loving peace, and pursuing peace, loving mankind, and bringing them near to the Torah.’”
2. “He used to say, ‘A name made great is a name destroyed, and he that makes worldly use of the crown perishes.’”
3. “He used to say, ‘If I am not for myself, who is for me? And being for mine own self, what am I? And if not now, when?’”

B. Hillel is attributed (B. Shabb. 30b–31a) to have said, “What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow. That is the Law and the Prophets, go and learn” (cf. Jesus’ Golden Rule).

Suggested Reading:


Questions to Consider:
1. Is the traditional dictionary definition of Pharisee anti-Jewish?
2. Has the “quest for the historical Hillel” the same value, and problems, as that for the “historical Jesus”?
3. If we view the Pharisees positively, how does this portrait influence our understanding of Jesus and the Gospels? Should Jesus be considered (as he often is) a “liberal Pharisee”?
Lecture Fourteen
The Herodians

Scope: Like the Pharisees and Sadducees, the Herodian family also receives generally negative treatment in the New Testament. Herod the Great, made king by Rome over Palestine and, thus, replacing the Hasmonean (Maccabean) dynasty, appears in the Gospel of Matthew as a new pharaoh who orders the “slaughter of the innocents”; Jesus is, in turn, the new Moses who escapes death. Herod Antipas, one of Herod’s few sons to survive his father’s murderous designs, became tetrarch of the Galilee; in the Gospels, John the Baptist condemns Antipas for marrying his brother’s wife, and Antipas beheads the Baptist to fulfill a promise made to his dancing daughter (named Salome in later tradition). Herod Agrippa I, appointed king over Judea by Caligula, executed the Apostle James. His own death is dramatically described by both Luke and Josephus. Agrippa I’s children, Herod Agrippa II and his sister, Berenice, appear in Acts as conversing with Paul. This lecture provides background information about the family and explains how and why they appear in both the New Testament and Josephus.

Outline

I. Herod the Great (73–4 B.C.E.) named in Matthew’s Gospel (chap. 2) as responsible for the “slaughter of the Innocents” but, ironically, never in antiquity called “the Great,” combined extensive building campaigns and a strong foreign policy with personal and domestic disasters.

A. Herod lived through one of the more tumultuous periods of Roman history. To provide context:

1. In 44, Caesar is assassinated, and the following year, the second triumvirate of Antony, Octavian, and Lepidus ascends.

2. In 32, Antony and Octavian separate, and in 31, at the Battle of Actium, Octavian conquers his rival. Herod, who had originally sided with Antony, accompanies Octavian from Egypt and is restored to governmental good graces. Augustus once quipped that he would rather be Herod’s pig than Herod’s son (“Melius est Herodis porcum esse quam filium”),
alluding to both the numerous executions of members of the royal family and the identification of Herod with Jewish practice.

B. His grandfather, Antipater, was an Idumean and convert to Judaism whom Alexander Janneaus appointed strategos over Idumea.

C. His father, also named Antipater, sided with Pompey in the Roman capture of Jerusalem (63) and, thereby, obtained governmental authority; he aided Hyrcanus II in regaining the throne. After defeating Pompey in 48, Caesar appoints Antipater procurator of Judea and grants him Roman citizenship. Herod’s mother was Cypros, a relative of King Aretas of Nabatea.

D. Internally, Herod sponsored the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple and the patriarchs’ tomb in Hebron. He built Caesarea Maritima; Sebaste (ancient Samaria); and fortresses, including Masada, Machaerus, and the Herodium. Herod refrained from deliberately antagonizing his Jewish constituents (unlike Pilate). He also donated funds and buildings to Diaspora communities. He increased Jerusalem’s water supply, built a navy, and set up a “free trade” zone for imports.

E. Externally, he supported Roman and Samaritan cults and sponsored the Olympic Games (12 or 8 B.C.E.).

F. Herod married ten times, participated in several divorces, and executed many sons, a wife, numerous in-laws, and even more political rivals.

G. Herod’s reign began under less-than-ideal circumstances, but overall, he provided the area with stability during a thirty-seven-year rule that saw the kingdom’s borders restored to Davidic proportions.

1. Herod, appointed governor of the Galilee in 47, immediately quashes the revolt under Hezekiah. For the executions he ordered, he was tried by the Sanhedrin; likely, the governor of Syria interfered to release Herod.

2. In 40, Jerusalem revolts against the rule of Herod and his brother Phasael, yet the Senate names him king over Judea, the Galilee, and Perea.

3. In 38, after a five-year engagement, Herod marries the Hasmonean princess Mariamme (I) in Samaria; the next year,
with Antony’s help, he conquers Jerusalem, purges the Sanhedrin, and arranges the execution of his Hasmonean rival. He defeats Antigonus in the summer of 37.


His love for her was not passionless nor such as arises from familiarity, but in its very earliest beginnings had been a divine madness, and even with freedom of cohabitation it was not restrained from growing greater. But now more than ever he seemed to be a prey to it as if by a kind of divine punishment for the death of Mariamme. And he would frequently call out for her and frequently utter unseemly laments. …

H. Josephus (Ant. 17.168–19) describes his symptoms in horrible detail, including worm infestation (attributed also to Antiochus IV Epiphanes, Sulla, Agrippa, and Galerius).

I. Stories of Herod were documented by Nicholas of Damascus (in his Universal History of the World) and Josephus and told by both Jewish and Christian writers.

J. Herod died in agony—from renal failure? syphilis?—and was buried, ancient sources suggest, in Herodium, near Bethlehem. His tomb has not yet been discovered.

K. His presentation in Matthew, although not verifiable from any external source and presented according to the template of Moses’s pharaoh, is consistent with what external Roman and Jewish sources record.

II. Herod the Great, having executed most of his sons, divides his kingdom among Philip, Antipas, and Archelaus.

A. At age sixteen, Philip, son of Cleopatra of Jerusalem, is appointed tetrarch of Trachonitis, Batanea, and surrounding areas (4 B.C.E.–34 C.E.). He is responsible for the building of Caesarea Philippi (site of Peter’s “confession”) and Bethsaida (where Jesus heals a blind man [Mark 8:22–26]).

B. Archelaus, nineteen-year-old son of Malthace of Samaria, is appointed ethnarch of Judea but proves a political failure, first by acceding to numerous requests (such as for tax relief and release of
prisoners), then by refusing to continue this generous policy by agreeing to new demands, such as for a new high priest.

1. By 6 C.E., Archelaus is replaced by direct Roman rule.
2. Matt. 2:20–23 explains that Joseph did not want to return to Judea under Archelaus’s rule.

C. Antipas, another son of Malthace, seventeen years old, becomes tetrarch of the Galilee and Perea.

1. He follows his father’s building practices, including the reconstruction of Sepphoris and the construction of Tiberias.
2. The daughter who danced before Herod and received John’s head is not named in the Gospels (Mark 6:14–29; Matt. 14:1–12).
3. According to Luke 23:6–12, Pilate sent Jesus to Antipas after hearing that Jesus was a Galilean.
4. Antipas and Herodias go to Rome in 39 to request Antipas be given the title “king”; Agrippa—Caligula’s friend and Herodias’s brother—brings charges against them, and they are banished to Gaul.

III. Herod Agrippa I (37–44), the son of Aristobolus and grandson of Herod the Great and Mariamme I (his mother was Bernice, the daughter of Herod’s sister Salome and Costobarus), was born c. 10 C.E.

A. After extravagant spending and a term as market inspector in Tiberias, Agrippa goes to Rome, where he befriends Gaius Caligula. When Agrippa suggests that Caligula be emperor, the currently reigning Tiberius imprisons him.

B. In 37, when Caligula becomes emperor, he releases Agrippa, “had him shaved and made him change his raiment. After which, he put a diadem on his head and appointed him to be king” (Ant. 18.237–39). Claudius, in 41, confirms Agrippa’s rule of Philip’s territories, as well as of Judea and Samaria. The return of a Jewish king may have bolstered messianic speculation.

C. Agrippa attempted to crack down on messianic movements; any subversion (or perceived subversion) of Roman policy would have threatened his own rule.

1. “About that time, King Herod laid violent hands upon some who belonged to the church. He had James, the brother of John, killed with the sword” (Acts 12:1–2).
2. Like Jesus, James dies at Passover.

D. In 44, Agrippa died suddenly in Caesarea: “He put on a garment made wholly of silver and came into the theater early one morning. The garment, illuminated by the sun’s rays upon it, shone out in a surprising manner and was so resplendent that, presently, his flatterers cried out that he was a god” (Ant. 19.8.2; see also Acts 12:22–23).

E. His son, Agrippa II, was only sixteen, and Claudius refused to appoint him in his father’s place. His daughter Drusilla eventually marries the Roman procurator Felix (see Acts 24:24, where the couple meet Paul).

IV. Herod Agrippa II (50–100), son of Agrippa I and Cypros (daughter of Herod’s nephew Phaseal), was born in 27 C.E.

A. Agrippa II was rumored to have had an incestuous relationship with his sister Berenice (who, in a first-century Latin inscription found in Beirut, is called “queen”).
   1. At age fifteen, Berenice married Marcus Julius Alexander of Alexandria, a nephew of Philo; thus, she was sister-in-law to Tiberius Julius Alexander, who was procurator of Judea, then aide to Titus.
   2. Agrippa I next marries her to his own brother, Herod of Chalcis.
   3. Roman historians, such as Suetonius, note Berenice’s affair with Titus, the son of Vespasian, who was responsible for the Roman troops in Judea when the Temple was destroyed and who later succeeded his father to the throne.


Suggested Reading:

Questions to Consider:

1. To what degree are the Herodians depicted in the Gospels and Acts according to scriptural prototypes (for example, Herod the Great as a new pharaoh to Jesus’ Moses; Agrippa I’s dying in a horrific manner similar to that of Judas)?

2. What mark, if any, did the Herodian family make on the development of Christianity?
Lecture Fifteen
Judas Iscariot

Scope: Seen as Jesus’ betrayer, who either acted from greed or was possessed by the devil; viewed as a political revolutionary attempting to prod Jesus into wrestling control of the country from Rome; regarded as an innocent dupe of the high priest’s machinations; or even construed as Jesus’ intimate friend who did what Jesus could not by arranging his arrest, Judas has captured the imagination of interpreters for the past 2,000 years. This lecture begins with the biblical accounts of this remarkably puzzling figure, then explores how historians, theologians, and artists have retold his story. Among the materials to be discussed are: the thesis that Judas is a fictional character; the association of Judas (whose name means “Jewish man”) with “the Jews”; the various stories, each elaborated with the passing of centuries, of his death; and his transformation into not only archetypal repentant but also romantic hero.

Outline

I. The name Judas Iscariot.
   A. Judas, meaning “Jewish man” (Hebrew: Judah), was a common name (for example, Judah Maccabee, Judah the Prince), with no fewer than eight New Testament bearers.
   B. Iscariot probably derives from Ish Kerioth, “man from [the village of] Kerioth.” Other possible derivations include the Aramaic sagor, “red” (thus, ruddy, or worker in red dye); sicarius, from the Latin and indicating “assassin”; sakar from the Semitic for “hand over”; and shaqar, Semitic for “fraud, deception.”

II. Introduction of Judas.
   A. Mark’s first mention of Judas is at Jesus’ appointing of the Twelve; the reference is followed immediately by “who betrayed him” (Mark 3:19; see also Luke 6:16).
   B. John 6:70–71 is harsher: “Did I not choose you, the Twelve, and one of you is a devil?” This reference to the “devil” associates
Judas with “the Jews,” whom the Johannine Jesus states, “are of your father, the devil” (8:44).

III. The increasing vilification of Judas can be traced through the stories of Jesus’ anointing.

A. In Mark 14:4–5, “One of the disciples” is upset by the “waste.” Mark juxtaposes the woman’s generosity to Jesus with Judas’s betrayal of him for money (14:10–11).

B. In John 12:4–6, “Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples, he who was to betray him, said, ‘Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?’ This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box he used to take what he put into it.”

IV. Judas’s vilification is also apparent in the descriptions of his motives.

A. In Mark 14:10–11, the financial incentive is offered by the priests.

B. Matthew offers greed as a motive.

C. In Luke 22:3–5, “Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was of the number of the Twelve; he … conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray him to them. And they were glad, and engaged to give him money.”

D. In John’s Gospel, Jesus says of the one to betray him, “‘It is he to whom I shall give this morsel when I have dipped it.’ So having dipped the morsel, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. Then after the morsel, Satan entered into him.” (See Ps. 41:9 for a possible proof text for the dinner scene.)

E. The blood price is “thirty pieces of silver.”

V. The kiss (Luke 22:48; Matt. 26:49; Mark 14:45).

A. “And immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, came up, and with him a crowd with swords and clubs, from the high priests and scribes and elders. The one who handed him over had given them a sign, saying, ‘The one whom I will kiss is he; seize him and lead him away under guard.’ And when he came, he immediately went up to him and said, ‘Rabbi,’ and kissed him” (Mark 14:43–45).
B. Luke 22:47–48 rephrases: “He drew near to Jesus to kiss him, but Jesus said to him, ‘Would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?’”

C. The kiss was a sign of Christian commitment, as in Pet. 5:14 (a kiss of *agape*). According to the *Gospel of Philip* (59), “It is only by a kiss that the perfect conceive and give birth. For this reason, we also kiss one another.”

VI. Judas’s death and the Field of Blood (*Akeldama*).

A. Matthew has Judas’s death resemble that of Achitophel (2 Sam. 15–17).

B. According to Matt. 27:6–8, Judas hangs himself. “But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, ‘It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since they are blood money.’ So they … bought with them the potter’s field, to bury strangers in. Therefore that field has been called the ‘Field of Blood’ to this day” (Matt. 27:6–8).

C. Acts 1:18–19 offers an aetiology presented in the context of Peter’s speech, “Now this man bought a field with the reward of his wickedness, and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their language *Akeldama*, that is, ‘Field of Blood.’” (Luke matches Judas’s grotesque death with that of Herod Agrippa [Acts 12:23].)

D. Papias (c. 130) claims:

Judas wandered in this world, a great example of impiety. His flesh swelled so much that where a cart went through easily, he was not able to go through, not even the mass of his head. … They say that he died on his own property, and that on account of the stench the place is desolate and uninhabited even until now, and that even today no one can go through that place without stopping up his nose with his hands, because the stench of his flesh spread out over the land so much.

VII. Questions of history.

A. Paul states that Jesus was “handed over” (*paradidomi*), a term that can also be translated “betrayed” (Rom. 4:25, 8:32; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 5:2, 25; 1 Cor. 11:23).
B. Judas resembles the literary trope of the conventional “betrayer,” including Seth, Brutus, and others.

C. Some scholars believe that Judas is an invented character designed to vilify Jews and decrease divine responsibility.

D. Other scholars insist that the church would not have invented such an “embarrassing” story.

VIII. Legendary development.

A. According to Irenaeus (130–200) and Epiphanius (310–403), the Cainites have a “Gospel of Judas,” consider Judas their “kinsman, and count him among those possessing the highest knowledge. … others say that the archons knew that if Christ were given over to the cross, their weak power would be drained. Judas, knowing this, bent every effort to betray him, thereby accomplishing a good work for our salvation.”

B. In the Arabic Infancy Gospel (fifth–sixth century), as a child, Judas was seized by Satan and would bite himself and others. His mother, hearing of Mary and Jesus, sought a cure, but they were unable to help. Judas struck Jesus, and Jesus wept.

C. In the Coptic tradition, Judas’s wife is the foster mother of Joseph of Arimathea’s seven-month infant; the child cries when Judas brings the thirty pieces of silver into the house.

D. In the Golden Legend of Jacobus de Voraigne (c. 1270), Judas (unknowingly) kills his father and marries his mother.

E. For Dante (1265–1321), in the pit of hell, the three-headed Satan chews on Brutus, Cassius, and Judas: “The biting he endured was nothing like the clawing that he took; sometimes his back was raked clean of its skin. ‘That soul up there who suffers most of all,’ my guide explained, ‘is Judas Iscariot: the one with head inside and legs out kicking.’”

F. In the passion plays (fourteenth–fifteenth century), when Judas hangs himself, demons tear his soul from his stomach, then boil it for Satan’s stew.

G. Medieval ballads surviving in Appalachia ascribe Judas’s fall to his sister: “Now Judas had a sister, an evil sister she; She hated gentle Jesus, for his Christianity.”
IX. Popular culture and anti-Judaism.

A. Vestiges of pagan festivals include the burning or beating of Judas effigies, sometimes noisily (“breaking of Judas’s bones”). This practice often led to attacks on Jews.

B. Various legendary attributes attached to Judas become attributed to all Jews: stench, greed and usury, gluttony, effete behavior and oversexuality, a curved nose and thick eyebrows.

C. The “Dreyfus affair” in France featured the popular equating of the Jewish army officer, found guilty of treason on trumped-up charges, with Judas.

D. Christian theologians of more recent times perpetuate the Judas myth.
   1. For Karl Barth: Judas “obviously represents the Jews, the tribe from which both David himself and his promised Son sprang. … Israel always tries to buy off Yahweh with thirty pieces of silver … and Israel itself delivers Him up to slaughter”(*Church Dogmatics* II.2).
   2. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote: “Who is Judas? Shouldn’t we ask here also about the name he carries? ‘Judas,’ doesn’t it stand here for that deeply divided people of Jesus’ origin, for the elect people, which had received the promise of the Messiah and yet rejected it?”(*Predigt am Sonntag Judika über Judas,* [in Klassen]).

X. Music, theatre, and movies.

A. From Aria 51 of Bach’s *St. John’s Passion* to *Jesus Christ, Superstar* to heavy-metal band Judas Priest, Judas provides an opportunity for iconoclastic experimentation.

B. In *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, Judas (David McCallum) is the first disciple called; at Caesarea Philippi, he confesses, “You are a great leader, and the greatest teacher I have ever known.” His motives are fuzzy, and he dies by throwing himself into the fire of the Temple altar.

C. In *King of Kings*, Judas (Rip Torn) is a friend of Barabbas.

D. In *Jesus Christ, Superstar*, Judas is a practical follower who finds Jesus’ claims for divinity inappropriate and unhelpful under Roman domination.
E. In *The Last Temptation of Christ* (based on the novel by Nicholas Katanzakis), Judas (Harvey Keitel) is Jesus’ closest friend, who does what Jesus cannot.

**Suggested Reading:**


**Questions to Consider:**

1. Would the story of Jesus be understood differently were there no Judas?
2. Why is there such a strong cultural tendency to regard Judas favorably?
3. What are the theological implications of Jesus’ allowing Judas to betray him?
Lecture Sixteen
Pontius Pilate

Scope: The Roman prefect (governor) of Judea from 26 to 36, Pilate appears in the writings of the Jewish historian Josephus and the Jewish philosopher Philo, as well as, less overtly, in the New Testament, as at best opportunist, culturally insensitive, and often cruel. This lecture begins by detailing Pilate’s reign and exploring his relationship to the Jews over whom he ruled. We turn next to the Gospels to watch how increasingly Pilate appears as less and less evil. This tradition continues into the post-New Testament church, where Pilate and his wife (who makes a brief appearance in Matthew’s Gospel) are not only exonerated of any responsibility in ordering Jesus’ Crucifixion, but are depicted as penitent converts to Christianity. In tracing the character of Pilate, we are, thus, also able to trace various Christian views of the relationship between church and (Roman) state, as well as between church and synagogue.

Outline

I. Pilate’s governorship of Judea.
   A. Jesus was crucified during Pilate’s governorship, which lasted from 26 to 36 C.E. The point is expressed in the creedal line: “Crucified under Pontius Pilate.”
      1. The procurator (Tacitas, Annals 15.44), or prefect, was subordinate to the senatorial legate of Syria. An inscription from Caesarea Maritima, discovered in 1961, reveals his correct title to be “prefect.”
      2. Pilate himself was appointed by Tiberius’s aid, Sejanus, himself known for anti-Jewish sentiments.
   B. Pilate was known for his lack of respect for his Jewish charges.
      1. Philo, around 41, describes Pilate in Ad Gaius 302: “[Pilate used] briberies, insults, robberies, outrages, wanton injuries, constantly repeating executions without trial, ceaseless and supremely grievous cruelty.” The letter, a protest against gold standards brought by Pilate to Jerusalem, prompted the emperor’s intervention.
2. Josephus, in *War* 2 (see also *Ant.* 18), observes:

   Pilate, being sent by Tiberius as procurator to Judaea, introduced into Jerusalem by night and under cover the effigies of Caesar which are called standards. This proceeding, when day broke, aroused immense excitement among the Jews … considering their laws to have been trampled under foot, as those laws permit no images to be erected in the city. Pilate does yield to the population’s threat of mass suicide.

3. *War* 2 observes that Pilate “provoked a fresh uproar by expending upon the construction of an aqueduct the sacred treasure known as Coronas … He, foreseeing a tumult, had interspersed among the crowd a troop of his soldiers, armed but disguised in civilian dress, with orders not to use their swords, but to beat any rioters with cudgels.”

4. Even the New Testament recognizes Pilate’s wanton cruelty; Luke 13:1 notes “the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.”

5. Pilate is removed from office for massacring a group of Samaritans; the rest of the population appealed to the legate, Vitellius, who ordered Pilate to Rome.

C. However, Pilate could have been worse.

   1. His term in office (the second longest gubernatorial tenure) suggests at least relatively decent relations with the Jerusalem aristocracy and priesthood.

   2. He did not put human likenesses on his coins.

II. All four Gospels show an interest in Barabbas, the criminal who is set free by Pilate.


   B. Pilate asks, “Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?” and he does so, according to Mark, “For he realized that it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed him over.”

      1. “But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas instead.”

      2. When Pilate inquires, “What evil has he done?” the crowd shouts all the more, “Crucify him.”
3. Pilate hands Jesus over, after flogging him, to be crucified.

C. The practice is not inconceivable, but this particular version is highly problematic.
   1. Philo notes that at festivals, Roman officials would postpone executions (such was the case with Flaccus, governor of Egypt from 32 to 38).
   2. However, in the Gospels’ case, it does not make sense. The prisoner is to be released to celebrate the feast; the Passover feast in the synoptics was celebrated the day before Barabbas’s release. Or, is John’s Gospel correct in that, there, the Last Supper is not a Seder?
   3. According to M. Sanh. 4.1 (see also Ant. 16.6.2), a capital case cannot be tried on the eve of a feast and must be held in the daytime, whereas John’s interrogation and the Sanhedrin trials in the synoptics are at night. Nor, contrary to Jewish law, are there defense witnesses, admonitions to witnesses to speak the truth, and so on.

D. Barabbas means, in Aramaic, “son of [the] father,” which is a cognate for Jesus’ own identification as “Son of Man,” as well as for claims of his divine paternity.
   1. In some manuscripts of Matthew, Barabbas’s first name is “Jesus.”
   2. Could the Barabbas scene be a parable of the meaning of the cross: The innocent is sacrificed so that the guilty might go free?

E. Could the scene be Mark’s claim that the Jerusalem crowd prefers rebellion?

III. Pilate’s portrait in the Gospels.
   A. Only in Matthew does Pilate wash his hands to symbolize his innocence: “When Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but rather that riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, ‘I am innocent of this man’s blood; see to it yourselves.’
   B. Only in Matthew do “all the people” cry, “His blood be on our heads and on the heads of our children” (27:25). For Matthew’s original readers, the cry would have referred to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E.
1. Only in Matthew do the “chief priests and the Pharisees” (27:62, an odd combination) command Pilate that he order a guard stationed at the tomb, lest “his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people,” because they remembered (unlike the disciples) that Jesus had predicted his Resurrection.

2. In the Gospel of Peter, the soldiers witness a general resurrection and report it to Pilate. Pilate reiterates that he is “clean from the blood of the Son of God.”

C. Only in Luke does Pilate declare Jesus “innocent” (he does this three times; Antipas does it once; and the centurion at the cross makes the same observation), but why would a Roman authority make such a declaration, then execute the accused, and thereby make himself look weak?


E. In John 19:7, the priests state, “We have a law, and by that law [Jesus] ought to die, because he has made himself the Son of God.” However, there is no law concerning this title, and the phrase would have been meaningless to Pilate in any case.

1. The major villains in John are “the Jews,” with Caiaphas representing the locus of responsibility for Jesus’ death; he says to Pilate: “It is better for you to have one man die for the people than that the entire nation should perish” (John 11).

2. In an elaborate staging of inside and outside movement, Pilate is pressured by “the Jews.” When he finally asks, “Am I a Jew?” the answer is implicitly “yes,” because Pilate agrees to have Jesus killed.

3. When Pilate speaks his famous line, “What is truth?” he does so in the face of the one who declared himself “the way and the truth.” This is Johannine irony at its best.

IV. Matt. 27:1–2, 11–26 mentions “Mrs. Pilate,” who is, in later legend, called Procla or Procula.

A. She encourages her husband to “have nothing to do with that righteous man [righteousness is a key term in Matthew’s Gospel] for I have suffered much in a dream about him [dreaming is also a Matthean motif].”
B. According to the Acts of Pilate, Pilate “summoned all the Jews and stood up and said to them, ‘You know that my wife is pious and prefers to practice Judaism with you.’”

V. Pilate in the church fathers and the Apocryphal Acts.

A. Tertullian considers Pilate a Christian.

B. The Letter of Pilate to Claudius has the prefect attesting the Resurrection and claiming to write “lest you should think that the lies of the Jews should be believed.”

C. The Gospel of Gamaliel has Pilate protect Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, as well as lecture “the Jews” on the lordship of Jesus.

D. By the sixth century, the Coptic church considers both Pilate and his wife saints and martyrs. Legend has Pilate beheaded by Caesar for executing Jesus, an innocent man.

1. As he completes his final prayer, a voice from heaven announces, “All generations and families of the Gentiles shall call you blessed.”

2. As Pilate is beheaded, “an angel of the Lord received it. And when Procla his wife saw the angel coming and receiving his head, she was filled with joy, and immediately gave up the ghost and was buried with her husband.”

3. In another version, Pilate is standing by his prison window (he has been incarcerated for killing the innocent Jesus) in the hopes of seeing the emperor’s face in order to gain pardon, and the emperor, aiming at a hind, shoots him.

Suggested Reading:


Questions to Consider:

1. Is it appropriate to seek to distinguish Christian apologetic from historical fact?


3. What are the implications of the legendary redemption of Pilate for Jewish-Christian and church-state relations?
Lecture Seventeen

James

Scope: Called “the Just” and “the brother of the Lord,” James appears in the Acts of the Apostles and in Paul’s letters as the head of the Jerusalem church (apparently succeeding Peter). Depicted in both these sources and in later Christian history as a completely faithful Jew, James emerges as one of the voices of compromise who facilitated the entry of Gentiles into the church but apart from Mosaic Law. This lecture returns to the Virgin Mary to discuss the controversy over whether Jesus had siblings (here we recall the Apocryphal Protevangelium of James, discussed in the lecture on Mary); moves briefly to James’s few Gospel notices, where he is not among Jesus’ followers; then concentrates on Acts and the Epistle to the Galatians to examine his leadership role and his theology. We conclude by addressing the debate over James’s authorship of the epistle that bears his name, the reasons for his death in 61 at the hands of the High Priest Ananus, and the legends that subsequently developed around him.

Outline

I. Identification of James.

A. There are at least six people named James in the New Testament.

B. The name in Hebrew/Aramaic would be Ya’acob (Jacob).
   1. The Semitic form recollects Jacob the patriarch, the eponymous ancestor of Israel.
   2. In Matthew’s genealogy, Jacob is the father of Joseph, Mary’s husband (Luke identifies Joseph’s father as Hiel).

C. “James the Just” comes from Hegisippus, a second-century Christian quoted by the fourth-century historian Eusebius. He explains that the epithet was used “for there were many Jameses” (Hist. 2.23.4).

D. James the Just was a major figure in the early church.
   1. He drops from attention the more the perpetual virginity of Mary is stressed.
2. Since the time of Martin Luther, he has been marginalized for his fidelity to the Law.

II. Did Jesus have siblings?

A. The New Testament refers to the “brothers and sisters” of Jesus (Mark 3:31–35, 6:3; John 2:12, 7:3, 5; Acts 1:14; 1 Cor. 9:5). Mark 6:3 names the brothers as “James, Joseph [Joses], Jude [Judas] and Simon [Symeon].”
   1. Luke’s notice (2:7) that Jesus was Mary’s “first born” implies she had others; Matthew’s notice that Joseph “did not know his wife until she had born a son” (1:25) suggests that he did afterward.

B. Helvidius argued that the “brothers and sisters” are children of Mary and Joseph, as did the Ebionites and Tertullian.

C. The Protevangelium of James proposes that James is a child of Joseph by a previous marriage. This becomes known as the Epiphanean position, which Origen also advocated. Mary remains a perpetual virgin.

D. The Hieronymian view (associated with Jerome [347–419] and Augustine [354–430]) argues for Mary’s perpetual virginity. It differs from the Epiphanean view in claiming that James and the others are children of Mary and Cleopas. Thus, Joseph remains virginal.

E. According to Jerome, James is called “brother of the Lord” for his “high character, incomparable faith, and extraordinary wisdom.”

III. James in the Gospels.

A. James does not appear to be a follower of Jesus before the Crucifixion.
   1. Mark 3:20–25 suggests that Jesus’ family thought him “beside himself” (however the Greek, oi par autou, can simply mean “those of him,” that is, friends and associates).
   2. John 7:5 states that Jesus’ brothers did not believe in him. However, some of his disciples, such as Thomas, are also unconvinced.
B. James’s leadership would have been easier to facilitate had he followed Jesus before the Crucifixion.
   1. If James wrote the Epistle, with its approximately thirty-six similarities to the Matthean sayings material, then he may have learned them while traveling with Jesus.
   2. The *Gospel of the Hebrews* (so Origen and Jerome) locates James at the Last Supper. After the Resurrection, “James had sworn that he would not eat bread from the hour in which he had drunk the cup of the Lord until he should see him risen from among them that sleep. And shortly thereafter the Lord said: ‘Bring a table and bread!’” And immediately it is added: “He took bread, blessed it and broke it and gave it to James the Just and said to him: ‘My brother, eat thy bread, for the Son of Man is risen from among those who sleep.’”

IV. James in Acts and Galatians.
   A. For Paul, James is among the “pillars” of the Jerusalem church, along with Cephas and John (Gal. 2:1–10).
   B. How James became the leader of the church is not detailed.
      1. In Acts 12:17, Peter tells his fellows to recount his prison escape “to James and the brothers.” Had James obtained leadership given Peter’s prison terms and travels?
      2. Does 1 Cor. 15:7 indicate that James gained authority because of a priority in the order of Resurrection appearances?
      3. In the *Gospel of Thomas*, the disciples say to Jesus, “We know that you will depart from us. Who will be our leader?” He replies, “Wherever you are, you are to go to James the righteous, for whose sake heaven and earth came into being.”
      4. Clement of Alexandria suggests that he was chosen by Peter, James (son of Zebedee), and John to be “bishop of Jerusalem.”
      5. Eusebius intimates that he won the vote of the Jerusalem church.
   C. At the Apostolic Council (Acts 15), James sends a letter to Diaspora churches instructing Gentile members to refrain from *porneia*, blood, anything strangled, and food offered to idols (15:28–29; see also Acts 21:25–26 and contrast 1 Cor. 8).
      1. The practices derive from Lev. 17–20 and relate to the rules for the “resident alien.”

D. According to Gal. 2:11–14, “men from James” convinced Peter and Barnabas to withdraw from their table fellowship with Gentiles in Antioch.

V. The Epistle of James begins, “James the slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ” and is addressed to “the twelve tribes of the dispersion” (Greek: Diaspora).

A. Although many biblical scholars argue that the Epistle is pseudonymously attributed to James and designed to counter a misunderstood Paulinism that lead to antinomianism, others propose that it was written by James and that Paul wrote in reaction to it. The address to the Diaspora presumes a compositional setting in Israel.

B. The work is often regarded as the “most Jewish” book in the New Testament: It calls for observance of the law (2:10) and claims Abraham was justified by works.

C. It does reflect knowledge of Jesus’ sayings (especially those recorded in Matthew).

VI. The death of James.

A. Josephus (Ant. 20.197–203) is followed by Eusebius (Hist. 2.23.21–24).

1. In 62, Festus died, and Caesar sent Albinus as his replacement. Agrippa II meanwhile installed as high priest Ananus, who was “rash in his temper and unusually daring” and “followed the party of the Sadducees” who are “more heartless than any of the other Jews … when they sit in judgment.”

2. Ananus convenes the Sanhedrin to try James, “the brother of Jesus who was called the Christ, and certain others.” The charge is “having transgressed the Law,” but no specifics are given. Nor is it clear that the “others” were followers of Jesus.

B. The sentence was stoning.

C. Why James is executed remains unclear.

1. Was he a political liability?

2. John Painter finds the rationale in the next passage in Josephus: the record that the deposed Ananus bribed both...
Albinus and the new high priest to give him the tithes due to rural priests who appear to have belonged to the Pharisaic party. Was James executed because he protested the illegal and ethically heinous actions of the high priest?

D. James’s execution signaled the end of the Jewish, law-observant Jerusalem church. The growth of the Gentile mission, the destruction of the Temple in 70, and the loss of James’s authority doomed the movement.

Suggested Reading:


Questions to Consider:
1. Has James any influence in contemporary church structure, theology, or practice?
2. To what extent should or does James’s relationship to Jesus (biological, half-brother, cousin …) affect one’s assessment of his role in the early church?
3. In October, 2002, an ossuary (a box in which bones were interred) was found in Jerusalem. The inscription reads “James the son of Joseph, the brother of Jesus.” The ossuary apparently dates to the middle of the 1st century AD. How might this finding influence your view of James, Joseph, and Jesus?
Lecture Eighteen
Stephen

Scope: Appointed along with six other “Hellenists” (a term we investigate) by the Twelve to address the needs of widows in the Jerusalem church, Stephen is never seen serving at table. Instead, he performs “great wonders and signs” that draw the attention of many who oppose both his actions and, we must presume, his proclamation of Jesus. Following the model established by Jesus in the Gospel passion narratives, Stephen is arrested and brought before the Council. When the high priest asks him if the charges of speaking against Torah and Temple are correct, Stephen gives a long speech; his words do not directly address the charges, but they so anger the crowd that Stephen is dragged out of the city and stoned. He thus becomes the first martyr to die for his proclamation of Jesus. It is at this point in Luke’s narrative that we first meet Paul. Through Stephen’s story, this lecture attempts to reconstruct the lives of Jesus’ Jewish followers in the first decade after the Crucifixion: their practices, proclamations, and persecutions.

Outline

   A. Communal lifestyle.
      1. Luke says that the men and women who had followed Jesus from the Galilee gathered together with Jesus’ mother and brothers. They initially numbered 120, which matches the rabbinic view that 120 men were required to form a synagogue council.
      2. The group “shared all things in common” and “would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need” (2:43–44; 4:32–35).
         a. This idealized practice was also known among Pythagoreans and Essenes; the practice is not necessarily related to eschatological expectations.
         b. Justin Martyr (Apol. 14:2–3) observes, “We who once coveted most greedily the wealth and fortune of others,
now place in common the goods we possess, dividing them with the needy.”

c. Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5) withhold part of the proceeds of a sale of land from the church after promising to deliver the full sum; this indicates that church members did not completely liquidate their assets.

d. The retention of some property by members is also suggested by Luke’s reference to Barnabas, who “sold a field that belonged to him, then brought the money, and laid it at the apostles’ feet” (4:37). If this practice was common, why mention only Barnabas’s participation?

B. The signs of the spirit, indicated by Pentecost events (religious enthusiasm), likely included not only glossolalia (speaking in tongues) but also visionary experiences, prophecy, and healings.

II. Reactions to this community from non-messianic Jews varied.

A. Luke portrays the general population as highly receptive, such that “day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved” (2:47).

B. Others are bewildered and skeptical; some regarded the manifestations of the spirit as symptoms of drunkenness (“they are filled with new wine”); thus, Peter begins his opening speech by noting, “it is only nine o’clock in the morning [and the bars aren’t open yet]” (2:16).

C. In formulaic manner, the “priests and the Sadducees” are “much annoyed” at their preaching, arrest Peter and John (several times), order them to cease their proclamations, yet “find no way to punish them because of the people” (4:21).

D. The severity of the reaction increases to lashing (5:4), mob violence (6:12), and finally, death.

III. The community expands into two identifiable groups, Hebrews and Hellenists (Acts 6).

A. Hellenists are probably Diaspora Jews, speakers of Greek, who have settled in Jerusalem; Hebrews are probably Aramaic speakers from Judea and the Galilee (that is, the original members of the group).
1. It is often argued that the Hebrews were more conservative (that is, they continued to find value in the practice of Judaism), but Luke does not indicate this.

2. Whereas Stephen speaks against the Temple, as we shall see, so did the people at Qumran, and few would doubt their theological “conservatism.”

B. “The Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food” (v. 1). The church continues the Jewish practice of *tzedakah*, charity (from the term meaning “righteousness”), or providing for the needy.

IV. The Twelve, reluctant to “neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables,” encourage the Hellenists to “select from among yourselves seven men of good standing” (Acts 6:1–7).

A. Ironically, of the Twelve, we hear only Peter preach; other preaching is done by Stephen, Philip, and Paul.

B. The seven appear all to be Hellenists; their names are Greek.

1. Further accounts are given of two of the seven, Stephen and Philip; the other five are, like the majority of the Apostles, not further addressed.

2. One Hellenist, Nicolaus, is a “proselyte” from Antioch (that is, a Gentile who converted to Judaism, moved to Jerusalem, then joined the church). Nicolaus may be seen as the first step of the movement outward beyond ethnic Judaism.

C. The Seven are appointed to “serve” (Greek: *diakonein*) at table.

1. *Diakonein* indicates one possible origin of the church office of “deacon,” although the seven are never called “deacons” and are not depicted as serving at table.

2. Their position is established by the “laying on of hands” (6:6).

D. Stephen, like the Apostles, performs “signs and wonders” (6:8); Philip does the same.

V. “Some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and others of those from Cilicia and Asia, stood up and argued with Stephen,” but were unsuccessful (6:9–10).
A. Other Hellenists resist Stephen; the issue is not ethnic or cultural but theological. The intra-Hellenist argument belies the conservative versus liberal division.

B. “Then they secretly instigated some men to say, ‘We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God’” (6:11); false witnesses state, “This man never stops saying things against this holy place and the law” (6:12–14).

C. They also charge Stephen with saying that Jesus will “destroy this place [the Temple] and will change the customs that Moses handed on to us” (6:14).
   1. In Mark 14:58 (see John 2:19), Jesus is similarly accused by false witnesses.
   2. The customs are “changed,” according to the narrative of Acts, only in regard to Gentile affiliation; Paul and James continue to epitomize halachic fidelity, although in Acts, Paul faces similar charges (21:20–21, 28; 24:7; 25:28).
   3. For Luke’s own time, however, the Pauline churches’ law-free message prevailed.
   4. Luke and many other Christian writers attribute the destruction of the Temple to the refusal of the “Jews” to accept Jesus as lord and savior.

VI. Stephen’s speech (the longest in Acts).
   A. Stephen’s legitimacy is shown through narrative description: His face was shining “like that of an angel” (that is, he is about to serve as an agent of heaven).
   B. His is not the best speech to give when on trial for a capital crime of blasphemy. Luke composed the speeches in Acts to fit the occasion—or in this case, narrative purpose—as was typical in Greek historiography.
   C. Stephen’s defense is that the followers of Jesus are the true Israel.
      1. Reciting Israel’s history, he highlights how the major figures were removed from the geographical center and the majority acclamation of Judaism.
      2. Abraham receives a call while in Mesopotamia and is told his descendants would be “resident aliens” in Egypt (7:2–7).
      3. Joseph is sold into slavery in Egypt (7:6–16), and Jacob joins him.
4. The tomb of the patriarchs is in Shechem (Gen. 33:19 and Josh. 24:32; contrast Gen. 50:13); Luke’s readers may have known that Herod the Great rebuilt the patriarchs’ tomb in Hebron.

5. Moses, rejected by his people, fled to Midian (Exod. 2:15 reports that Moses flees not because of rejection, but for fear of Pharaoh’s anger), and in the wilderness, the angel appears to him.

D. True fidelity existed before Solomon’s Temple, when the “tent of meeting” was in the wilderness, because the “Most High does not dwell in a Temple made by hands” (7:48; see 1 Kings 8:20–27).

VII. Stephen’s vision, like Jesus’ Resurrection, confirms the truth of his testimony.

A. He sees “the Son of Man standing at the right hand of the Father” (7:56).

B. For the audience, this may sound like blasphemy, a compromise of monotheism. Yet in the first century, some Jews did believe that God had a divine agent, such as the Logos, Wisdom, or Metatron.

VIII. Stephen is dragged outside Jerusalem, just as Golgotha is outside the city (7:58; 8:1).

A. Whereas Jesus is executed by Roman authority, Stephen is lynched by a mob.

B. He prays (see Ps. 31:5) but addresses his prayer to “Lord Jesus.” Like Jesus, he prays that his executors be forgiven (Luke 23:34).


D. Thus, it is not accidental that Luke ends the account of Stephen’s martyrdom with a mention of Paul, at whose feet those who stoned Stephen laid their garments.

IX. “That day a severe persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout the countryside of Judea and Samaria” (8:1).

A. “Devout men buried Stephen and made loud lamentation over him” (8:2). Who are these “devout men”? Why are they not scattered?
B. Why are the Apostles not themselves scattered?

X. Christian martyrrologies develop from a combination of the Crucifixion account (as we already see in the recounting of Stephen’s death), Stephen’s martyrdom, and both pagan and Jewish martyrdom traditions.

Suggested Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. Should religious authorities be able to determine the beliefs and practices of their members?
2. In what cases, if any, should martyrdom be sought? Encouraged?
3. How is Stephen’s death related to the accounts of Jesus’ death? Was Stephen, too, deserted by those in his own community?
4. To what extent is the polemic of Stephen’s speech a result of the church’s frustration with the synagogue, given that the vast majority of Jews were not convinced by the Christian proclamation and that this majority claimed—as did the church—to be the true heirs of Abraham, the true people in continuity with Israel?
5. After Auschwitz, what is one to make of Stephen’s charges against the “Jews” of being “Christ-killers” and of Luke’s narrative in which Stephen is a Christ-like figure?
Lecture Nineteen

Philip

Scope: A second Hellenist, Philip, flees Jerusalem at the start of the persecution during which Stephen lost his life. This lecture follows Philip as he begins the process of converting Samaria; here, we also encounter Simon Magus, a great magician, who according to the later church, was “the father of all heresies.” We next spend time with Philip: ordered by an angel to take the road from Jerusalem to Gaza, he provides instruction in biblical interpretation to an Ethiopian court official (called also the “Ethiopian eunuch”; this man may have been a “god-fearer,” that is, a Gentile who affiliated with Judaism). Eventually, on the official’s insistence, Philip baptizes him. Then “snatched away” by the “Spirit of the Lord,” Philip continues his missionary activities until arriving in Caesarea; there, Acts tells us later, he lived with his four virgin daughters who prophesied. Likely only a portion of a more extensive story, Acts’ vignettes about Philip offer hints into the development of the “New Testament Apocrypha”: early legends about the major figures in the Gospels and Acts.

Outline

I. Philip is a Greek name well known to both Jews and Christians in the first century C.E.
   A. Philip of Macedon (359–336 B.C.E.; see 1 Macc. 1:1; 6:2) was the father of Alexander the Great.
   B. Philip, according to Matt. 14:3; Mark 6:17 (see Luke 3:19), was the brother of Herod Antipas and erstwhile husband of Herodias.
   C. Herod Philip (d. 33–34?), the son of Herod the Great, was granted the tetrarchy from the Sea of Galilee north and east to the Syrian border.
   D. We also know Philip the Apostle (Matt. 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:14; Acts 1:13; John 1:43–51; 6:1–14; 12:20–22 [where he is associated with “Greeks”];14:8–11).
II. Philip was appointed, with Stephen, by the Twelve, to serve \textit{(diakonein)} at table and, thereby, ensure the Hellenist widows’ food distribution (Acts 6:1–6).

A. Likely he was a (Greek-speaking) Jew, not native to Jerusalem.

B. We might associate him with Stephen’s views of Temple and Torah, but Luke does not mention Philip’s specific views of the Jewish cultus and Law.

C. When the Hellenists (or all but the Twelve) are persecuted and, consequently, dispersed from Jerusalem, “those who were scattered abroad went about preaching the word” (8:4). Philip goes (by choice?) to Samaria.

D. Luke may have had a cycle of “Philip” stories. Philip is introduced abruptly following Stephen’s martyrdom; readers would expect the next account to be Paul’s story. A similar abruptness characterizes the description of his move to Caesarea.

E. Concerning Simon Magus, Acts 8:10–11 states that the Samaritans “all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying ‘This man is the great power of God,’ and they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time.”


A. Magus is the singular of Magi; reading Acts in light of Matthew 2, we might expect Simon or those who follow him to be inept or foolish. It is not clear if Simon is a Samaritan or simply popular in Samaria.

B. Simon’s story raises the intractable question of how one distinguishes between miracle and magic (medicine is the third category). Simon can do mighty works or “sorcery” (8:9; see also 13:4–12; 101:19), and Peter and John do “signs and wonders” (8:13).

1. They were “hearing and seeing the miracles he did, for unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who had been possessed, and many who were paralyzed and the lame were healed” (8:6b–7). Miracles fight supernatural evil and provide human wholeness.
2. Philip “preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ” (8:12), not himself.

3. Peter and John give the glory to the Christ or the Holy Spirit (usually), but Simon was “saying that he was someone great” (8:9).

C. Simon is baptized, apparently on the basis of Philip’s teaching and at his hand (8:13), and continuing with Philip, he was “amazed, seeing the miracles and signs.”

D. Philip disappears from the story (he and the Apostles do not converse) as the “Apostles who were in Jerusalem” hear about Samaria’s conversion and send Peter and John, who prayed that these newly baptized believers would receive the Holy Spirit.

1. Philip, the Hellenist, does not have the apostolic authority of the Twelve.

2. Simon offers the Apostles money for “this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit” (8:19); this is the origin of the term simony. (In later tradition, baptism, the laying-on of hands, and the gift of the Spirit were a single event [see Acts 2:38; 19:5–6].)

3. Peter indicts Simon for evil: “You and your money can go to hell.” Simon thus serves, as do Ananias and Sapphira (5:1–11), as a negative exemplar on the use of funds.

E. Although in Acts Simon appears contrite (8:24), Irenaeus labels him the “father of all heresies.”

1. In Gnostic tradition, he is the consort of Helena (a Sophia-figure) whom he rescued from a brothel (symbolizing the prison of the flesh).

2. In church legend, he duels with Peter in Rome. Claiming the ability to fly, he launches himself, but Peter causes his downfall.

3. More ignominiously, he appears, played by Jack Palance (to Virginia Mayo’s Helena), in the movie version of Thomas B. Chastain’s The Silver Chalice, a film also notable as Paul Newman’s debut (as the Jewish silversmith).

IV. The Ethiopian chamberlain.

A. An angel commands Philip, “Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” Luke adds, “This is desert.”
1. As the Good Samaritan parable suggests, going down a road (Jerusalem to Jericho) alone is dangerous.

2. The angel—or the Spirit of God (the two are interchangeable in this episode)—later takes Philip to Azotus.

B. Philip finds “a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and who had come to Jerusalem to worship” (8:27).

1. *Candace* is a title rather than a proper name.

2. Ethiopia, for Luke, is probably to be associated with Meroe, a Nubian capital on the Nile, in what is now the Sudan.


4. Ps. 68:31 prays, “Let Ethiopia hasten to stretch out her hands to God.”

5. Eunuchs are often positive biblical figures: (possibly) Potiphar, Jeremiah’s rescuer, Nehemiah, Esther’s Hegai. Later Jewish legends add Daniel. Eunuchs were highly placed courtiers and harem guards, and Jesus speaks of being a eunuch for the kingdom (Matt. 19:12).

C. “He was reading Isaiah the prophet” (8:28).

1. For the Gospel’s expansion, the eunuch follows Hellenistic Jews and Samaritans.

2. He may have been a Jew, but more likely, he is a God-fearer.

3. Perhaps he was ineligible for circumcision or conversion (see Deut. 23:1, although even the *Mishnah* records that “if a priest that was a eunuch by nature married the daughter of an Israelite, he gives her the right to eat the Heave offering … [Yeb. 7:6]).

D. Acts claims he read Isa. 53:7–8; of direct pertinence to the chamberlain’s situation is Isa 56:4–5 (see also Wis. 3:13–14): “To the eunuchs who keep my sabbaths, and who choose that which pleases me and strengthen my covenant, I will give to them … a monument [Hebrew: *yad*, that is, “phallus” or “seed”] and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that will not be cut off.”

E. The chamberlain invites Philip, who has been conversing while on foot (perhaps afoot), into his chariot to explain the passage. As
Philip speaks, the chamberlain spots water, and asks, “What is to prevent me from being baptized?”

1. The reference to “prevent” or “hinder” may indicate an early baptismal formula.
2. Eusebius (Hist. 2.213–14) reports that the chamberlain became an evangelist.

F. “When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip … and Philip found himself at Azotus”; he continued to proclaim until he came to Caesarea.

V. According to Acts 21:8–9, Philip has a house in Caesarea where Paul and his companions stayed for a week.

A. Living there were Philip’s four virgin daughters, who had the gift of prophecy.
   1. Prophetic women were known in both Jewish (Job’s daughters) and pagan (Sibylline oracles; Delphic oracle) traditions.
   2. The daughters may be associated with the Virgin Mary and the widow Anna.
   4. Eusebius (Hist. 3:31) states that the daughters moved to Heirapolis in Phrygia, and other traditions record that some of them married.

B. Although their prophecy is not recorded, immediately after their introduction, Luke mentions “a prophet named Agabus” from Judea, who performs prophetic signs.

VI. Tradition confuses Philip the Apostle (the Twelve) with the “‘Deacon’ (the seven).

A. The Gospel of Philip is a Gnostic text from Nag Hammadi; the work itself is anonymous, but Philip receives credit for authorship because he is the only Apostle named. Similar to other apocryphal Gospels and Acts, this text emphasizes celibacy. It also provides guidance on how to overcome demons, a few sayings attributed to and anecdotes about Jesus, and a stress on Adam’s original androgyyny.
B. The *Acts of Philip* describes Philip’s evangelistic activities alongside his sister Marion and his fellow Apostle Bartholomew, his message of celibacy and vegetarianism, his conversion of the wife of the governor of Ophiorymos, several healings, his generally negative view of the “Old Testament,” and his death in Hierapolis.

**Suggested Reading:**

**Question to Consider:**
1. What is the difference among miracle, medicine, and magic?
2. What do the roles of the seven Hellenistic and twelve Apostles suggest about church leadership?
Lecture Twenty
The Centurions

Scope: Centurions are Roman army officers of prestigious rank, and their appearances in the Gospels and Acts provide tantalizing clues into the early Christians’ hopes for rapprochement with Rome. We begin this lecture by looking at the perilous life of Christians, especially Gentile Christians, in light of Roman customs and concerns, as well as the role of the army in maintaining the Pax Romana. We then focus on three centurions who appear in the New Testament: the one for whom Jesus heals his child (or slave; there are different versions of the story); the one who at the cross who proclaims Jesus either “son of God” (Matthew, Mark) or “innocent” (Luke); and Cornelius, converted by Peter following a strange revelatory dream. We conclude with observations on Cornelius’s role as the model Christian Gentile and remarks on later legends concerning these various Roman officers.

Outline

I. The dangers of being a Christian in the Roman Empire were numerous.
   A. Especially for Gentiles, affiliating with the church would cause cultural and familial disruption.
      1. The new family would be that of fellow Christians.
      2. Gentiles (especially of the upper classes) would no longer be able to participate in symposia or banquets where “idol meat” was served or libations poured.
      3. Charges of flagitia (incest and cannibalism) might be expected, along with accusations of treason and misanthropy.
      4. The proclamation of Jesus as a “king” would appear politically threatening.
      5. Depending on the time and location, association with Jews or the “Jewish God” could be dangerous.
   B. Paul’s letters and others consistently speak of the importance of church members’ fidelity to the state (see Romans 13 but contrast Revelation).
C. The Gospels and Acts appear to emphasize that members of the army could become Christians and, indeed, that these newcomers are among the movement’s most loyal members.

II. The Roman army and the *Pax Romana*.

**A.** The principal unit outside of Rome was the *legion* (see Mark 5:1–20), with a complement of 5,500 to 6,000 men (Roman citizens).

1. Legions were commanded by imperial legates (of the senatorial rank).

2. Under each legate were six tribunes (see Acts 21:31; 23:26 on Claudius Lysias) and sixty centurions. Hence, there were sixty centuries in a legion.

3. In the first century, Rome had 25 to 30 legions, but not until 70 C.E. was a legion (the tenth, Fratensis) stationed in Judea.

**B.** In addition to legions, Rome employed auxiliary troops, often comprised of conscripts.

1. The Italian and Augustan “cohorts” (Acts 10:1; 27:1) were stationed in Judea.

2. Because Jews were exempt from conscription, Judean auxiliaries were likely comprised of Syrians, Samaritans, or Caesareans.

3. Auxiliary troops were not citizens, but citizenship was often awarded to them for twenty-five years of service.

**C.** The centurion was the presiding officer over a “century,” which normally consisted of 80 men, not 100.

1. The centurions, who may be compared to commanders today, had judicial and administrative, as well as military, responsibilities.

2. Centurions also functioned in the auxiliary troops. Some were soldiers who rose through the ranks; others transferred from the legions.

   a. Thus, the centurion in Capernaum (Matt. 8:5) may have been a member of Herod’s auxiliary force.

   b. The centurions at the cross (Mark 15:39 and parallel passages) and at Paul’s arrest (Acts 21:32) were also likely auxiliary members, as were Cornelius (Acts 10:1) and Julius (Acts 27:1).

3. Some were citizens (perhaps recently enfranchised); Cornelius and Julius likely are examples.
III. The healed servant or son (Matt. 8:5–13; Luke 7:2–10; John 4:46–54).

A. The Capernaum centurion is a non-Jew in Matthew’s account.
   1. Like the Canaanite woman (Matt. 15:21–28), the centurion seeks a healing for a “child” (or “servant”).
   2. Jesus initially refuses the centurion’s plea (see also 15:21–28).
   3. The centurion humbles himself: “Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof … for I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one ‘Go’ and he goes, and to another ‘Come’ and he comes, and to my slave, ‘Do this,’ and he does it” (8:9; Luke 7:8).
   4. Jesus responds, “Not even in Israel have I found such faith” (8:10; Luke 7:9).

B. In Luke 7:2–10, the Capernaum centurion is a God-fearer, which emphasizes the connection of the Christian movement with Judaism.
   1. The centurion “sent some Jewish elders to him, asking him to come and heal his slave. …” They state to Jesus, “He is worthy of having you do this for him, for he loves our people, and it is he who built our synagogue for us” (7:3–4).
   2. In this account as well, the healing is performed at a distance.

C. John 4:46–54 refers only to a “royal official” in Capernaum, but the plot is similar. The scene functions as a “sign” (4:54) of Jesus’ power and prompts belief.

IV. The centurion at the cross (Longinus).

A. In Mark 15:39, the centurion sees Jesus die and proclaims, “Truly this man was a son of God.”

B. In Matt. 27:54, “When the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, ‘Truly this man was a son of God.’”

C. In Luke 23:47, “When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, ‘Certainly this man was innocent/righteous.’”

D. In the apocryphal Letter of Pilate to Herod, the centurion, named Longinus, accompanies Procla to Galilee to witness the teaching of the resurrected Jesus. The Gospel of Peter mentions a centurion named Petronius, who is sent by Pilate to guard the tomb.
V. Cornelius is the subject of Acts’ longest single narrative (10:1–11:18).

A. “And there was some man in Caesarea, by name Cornelius, a centurion out of the cohort called ‘Italian’” (10:1). Caesarea is the site where the revolt against Rome broke out in 66; the initial struggle between Jews and Gentiles was over the erection of Roman standards.

B. He was “pious/faithful and fearing God with all his household, doing many charitable deeds for the people and serving God through all” (10:2). Like the centurion in Luke 7, he is a model “God-fearer” and “righteous Gentile.”

C. Angels announce to Cornelius that his “prayers and charitable deeds” are known in heaven and command that he fetch Simon (Peter) from Joppa.

1. Luke’s irony appears: the centurion is now the one “under authority.”

2. The angel is precise: Peter is living with one Simon a tanner (so that the “Simons” won’t be confused) in a house by the sea. One could easily find a tanner’s house by the smell.

D. At the house of Simon the tanner, at around noon, Peter goes up on the roof (to pray? escape the smell?). “And being hungry and he wished to eat, while they were preparing a meal, there came upon him ecstasy. And he saw the heaven having been opened and descending some vessel like a cloth. … And upon it were all the four-footed [creatures] and snakes [reptiles] of the earth and birds of the heaven.” A voice commands: “Rise, Peter. Kill and eat.” Peter refuses: “At no time have I eaten anything common and unclean.” But he is told, three times, “What God cleansed you do not call common.”

1. As Peter is wondering about the vision, he sees standing by the gate the men sent by Cornelius.

2. Prompted by both the Spirit and Cornelius’s rank—“Cornelius, a centurion, a man of justice and fearing the God, witnessed even by all the nation of the Jews, was warned/instructed by a holy angel to summon you to his house and to hear matters from you” (10:22)—Peter goes to Caesarea.

E. “While Peter was still speaking these matters, the holy spirit fell upon all the ones hearing the word” (10:44).
1. Here, contrary to the conversion of Samaria, the Spirit precedes baptism.
2. Luke stresses that “those of the circumcision” (10:45) witness the outpouring upon Gentiles, as manifested by speaking in tongues and glorifying God.
3. Peter immediately asks for water (contrast the Ethiopian chamberlain of Acts 8, who points to water and insists that Philip baptize him).

F. Peter repeats the story of Cornelius’s conversion for the Jerusalem contingent (11:1–18) and hints at it at the Apostolic Council (Acts 15:7–11).

VI. Legendary development.
   A. The centurion who pierces Jesus’ side in John is assimilated to the centurion who confesses him “Son of God” in Mark and Matthew. Named Longinus, he is, according to legend, martyred at Caesarea in Cappadocia in 58.
   B. In Thomas B. Chastain’s “The Robe,” the centurion (identified as a tribune named Marcellus; in the movie version, played by Richard Burton) becomes a believer who is eventually martyred by Nero.

Suggested Reading:


Questions to Consider:
1. Some post-colonial readers interpret the centurion of Matthew 8 and parallels as a representative of an occupation government and see the “slave/servant” as a local who is paralyzed because of political disruption or personal (sexual) abuse. To what extent do the Gospel narratives lend themselves to this thesis?
2. Given what you know of Christian teaching, can one both serve Christ and Rome? Is to be a military official consistent or inconsistent with the Gospel?

3. Is it correct to claim, as some readers do, that by aiding a Roman officer and returning a slave to a position in which he is able to work for that officer, Jesus is a collaborationist?
Lecture Twenty-One
Paul, the Hero of Acts

Scope: A persecutor of the church, Saul of Tarsus experiences a vision on the road to Damascus and is transformed into Christianity’s foremost missionary, Paul. This lecture, the first of two on Paul, addresses his depiction according to the Acts of the Apostles. We follow Paul from Stephen’s martyrdom to his initial persecution of Jesus’ followers, address the three versions of his vision on the Damascus Road, then watch him develop his missionary role. Scenes to be studied, along with various miracles and persecutions by opponents, include the escape from Damascus, the separation from Barnabas, the conversion of Lydia, the fate of Eutychus, and the final journey to Rome. Throughout, we observe parallels to these stories in both Jewish and pagan sources and note how they relate to Luke’s artistry. We conclude with a notice of the distinctions between Paul’s presentation in Acts and the portrait that can be painted from clues in his letters.

Outline

I. Paul the persecutor of the church.
   A. Paul was born in Tarsus, a Stoic stronghold in Silesia, c. 1–10 C.E.; his Epistles, as we shall see, indicate he was a Benjaminitie, a Pharisee, and zealous for the Law.
      1. Acts 22 adds that he was educated at the feet of Gamaliel.
      2. According to Acts 18:3, he was by trade a tent-maker.
   B. The introduction to Paul in Acts is at Stephen’s martyrdom: “And the witnesses [a Lucan technical term] laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul … and Saul was consenting to his death” (7:58; 8:1).
   C. Next, “Saul ravaged the Church and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison” (9:2–3).
   D. Saul’s motives for the persecution are not clear. Did he think the followers of Jesus were guilty of blasphemying Temple and Torah? Were they a political danger in that they told Gentiles in the
synagogue not to worship pagan gods? Why pursue those in the Diaspora and return them to Jerusalem rather than pursue the Jerusalem church itself?

II. Acts 9:3–5 recounts that as Paul was approaching Damascus, armed with letters from the high priest to the local synagogue, “suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?’”

A. The story is recounted differently in Acts 9, 22, 26 and Gal. 1:13–17.


C. Paul’s companions hear but do not “see” anything; nor is it clear what Paul “sees.”

D. Paul, blinded and fasting for three days, is led to Damascus, where Ananias, understandably hesitant, is commissioned to care for Paul, the “chosen instrument” (9:15) who will evangelize the Gentiles.

E. Paul will later cause “a Jewish false prophet, named Bar Jesus” or Elymas, who had tried to turn the proconsul of Paphos, Sergius Paulus, away from belief in Jesus, to become blind (Acts 13:4–12). Sergius Paulus, understandably impressed, converts.

III. Paul proclaims in the synagogues of Damascus that Jesus is the “Son of God” (9:20), and the “Jews” seek to kill him. He escapes by being let down over a wall in a basket (9:25; see also 2 Cor. 11:32–33). A similar story is told of the escape of Johannan ben Zakkai from Jerusalem during the First Revolt against Rome (66–70).

A. Synagogue-based persecution continues following each preaching tour: in Psidian Antioch, in Iconium, and so on.

B. The persecutions spur Paul to move to the next town, and the congregation grows.

IV. When Paul returns from Damascus to Jerusalem and attempts to join the disciples, Barnabas testifies to his evangelizing and being persecuted for it in Damascus (9:26–27).

A. Barnabas (Hebrew: “son of encouragement”) was a Levite from Cyprus who antedated Paul in the mission field (Acts 4:36–37).
B. In Antioch-on-the-Orontes, Barnabas (who had been commissioned by the Apostles to investigate the entry of Gentiles into the church) and Saul, after teaching there together for a year, are set apart by the Holy Spirit for evangelizing the Gentiles (13:2); according to Paul (1 Cor. 9:3-6), Barnabas is a fellow Apostle.

C. In Acts 15, they separate over allowing John Mark, who had left an earlier trip (Acts 13), to participate in another missionary journey; Barnabas may have been John Mark’s cousin (Col. 4:10). (According to Gal. 2:11–14, Barnabas sides with Peter and John Mark in the dispute over table fellowship.)

D. The Epistle of Barnabas, a Christian text that uses rabbinic hermeneutical techniques to explain both how the covenant between God and the Jews was broken at Sinai and how the Scriptures of Israel predict the coming of Jesus, is found in some early canons.

V. The conversion of Lydia, a “dyer of purple” from Thyatira and currently living in Philippi, marks Paul’s activity on European soil.

A. While staying with Lydia, he performs an exorcism on a mantic slave girl who continued to follow him and his colleagues and to annoy them by shouting, “These men are slaves of the Most High God” (Acts 16:17).

B. The girl’s owners charge Paul and Silas with being “Jews [who] are advocating customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to adopt or observe” (16:21). A similar condemnation of Paul for financial loss occurs in Ephesus, when the silversmiths find their idol business idling.
   1. Paul and Silas escape jail when an earthquake shakes the building’s foundation.
   2. Paul “saves” the jailer, about to commit suicide for allowing prisoners to escape.

VI. In Troas (Acts 20:7–12), Paul speaks for so long that Eutychus (Greek: “good fortune”), falls asleep, falls out a third-story window, and dies. Paul quickly resurreets him, then continues to talk on until dawn.

VII. Arrest and final journey.

A. Following a mob reaction against Paul’s insistence that he was divinely sent to the Gentiles, the tribune in Jerusalem orders that
he be taken to the barracks and flogged to learn the reason for the outcry. Paul responds, “Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who is uncondemned?” (22:25).

1. Paul is, like Jesus, brought before the Sanhedrin, where he proves himself faithful to his ancestral customs. Proclaiming his belief in the Resurrection, he is removed by the tribunal as the Pharisees and Sadducees begin to fight.

2. Paul’s nephew (his sister’s son) sends word to him in prison about an impending attack by local Jews. Paul is spirited out of the city and moved to Herod’s praetorium in Caesarea, where he pleads his case before Felix and Drusilla.

3. Two years later, Felix is succeeded by Porcius Festus, who decides to send Paul to the emperor for judgment. Coming to welcome Festus on his appointment, Agrippa II and Berenice also hear Paul speak.

B. According to Dennis R. Macdonald, Acts 27–28 holds much in common with Books 5 and 12 of the Odyssey, including shipwrecks, nautical imagery, divine beings who assure safety, sailors jumping off ships and riding planks to safety, the island of hospitable strangers, a hero mistaken as a god, and the sending off of the hero. Luke uses these tropes to exalt Paul and fellow Christians.

1. While Odysseus panics, Paul remains unflappable.

2. Zeus drowns Odysseus’s crew for killing Helios’s cattle, whereas God saves the 276 passengers from drowning.

C. On Malta, Paul is bitten by a viper; when he does not swell up and die, the locals conclude he is divine.

D. Acts ends with Paul preaching “open and unhindered” in Rome, albeit while under arrest. Did Luke suppress the account of Paul’s death?

VIII. Distinctions from Epistles.

A. Although Acts’ use of “we” (the “we source” or “itinerary”) in part of Paul’s story gives the impression that the author traveled with Paul, many scholars doubt this to be the case. In the “quest for the historical Paul,” scholars typically privilege the Pauline Epistles over Acts (as Luke’s “Jesus” is assessed in light of other portraits).
B. The itinerary may be a source borrowed by Luke or an attempt at verisimilitude.

C. In Acts, Paul preaches openly in Jerusalem; according to Galatians, he is not known by sight in the Judean churches.

D. In Acts, Paul submits to James’s authority; in Galatians, he stresses his independence.

E. In Acts, Paul is Torah-centered: he goes to the Temple, circumcises Timothy (16:1–5), and so on. The Epistles insist that circumcision is to no avail and that “Christ is the end of the Law” (Romans 10).

F. Romans describes pagans as mired in sin; Acts 17:16–34, the Areopagus (Mars Hill) speech, offers a positive picture of pagan piety. The Paul of Acts also quotes the pagan poets Aretus and Epimenides.

G. Acts omits many of the Epistles’ major themes, such as the cross (Acts emphasizes Resurrection and final judgment), justification by faith, the relationship between sin and grace, and an eschatological urgency. However, the Epistles are addressed to people already in the church, while the missionary speeches in Acts are designed for conversion. Different audiences may prompt different emphases. Nor does Paul sound every theme in every letter.

H. Acts’ Paul may serve an apologetic function: to prove Paul is no political threat, to show Paul’s fidelity to Judaism, or to enhance his apostolic credentials.

I. The New Testament’s canonical order encourages the reader to interpret Paul’s Epistles in light of Acts; thus, Paul’s relationship to Jewish tradition is confirmed.

IX. The battle for Paul in story and canon.

A. In the Acts of Paul and Thecla, Paul is resistant to having a woman follow him, and the burden of his preaching concerns celibacy. Conversely, canonical letters attributed to him (1, 2 Timothy; Titus) extol and even mandate conjugal relations.

B. The Acts of Paul (3) describes the Apostle: “A man of small stature, with a bald head and crooked legs, in a good state of body, with eyebrows meeting and a nose somewhat hooked, full of
friendliness, for now he appeared like a man, and now he had the face of an angel.”

C. Church legend offers that Paul was beheaded by Nero c. 64. As Tacitus notes, Nero arrested self-acknowledged Christians and, on their information, condemned others, “not so much for their incendiarism as for their anti-social tendencies” (or “the hostility against them”).

Suggested Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. Is the portrait of Paul in Acts to be seen as pro-Jewish or anti-Jewish?
2. How might the placement of Acts before the Pauline Epistles influence our understanding of those Epistles?
3. Can the portraits of Paul in Acts and in his own Epistles be harmonized? Should they be?
Lecture Twenty-Two
Paul, the Epistolary Evangelist

Scope: This lecture studies Paul as he can be known from the letters attributed to him in the New Testament. The topics we consider include the debates over Pauline authorship (did Paul write the letters that appear in his name, and why do many biblical scholars consider 1, 2 Timothy and Titus, the Pastoral Epistles, to be written by a follower of Paul after the apostle had died?), as well as Paul’s views on the “Old Testament” (a term he would not have known) and Judaism, women and slavery, the fates of Gentiles and Jews, the end of the world, and the Christ. We conclude by looking at how Paul has been understood by later generations, from the (Apocryphal) Acts of Paul and Thecla, to his influence on such major theologians as Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and Wesley, to current debates about Paul’s thoughts and contributions.

Outline

I. Sources for understanding Paul.

A. Paul is the only person from the first few decades of the Christian movement who leaves direct testimony to its development; he is also the only (a few would put Josephus in this category) Pharisee from whom we have written records.

1. There are seven undisputed letters: 1 Thessalonians, Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Philippians, Philemon, and Romans.

2. Six letters are written under Paul’s name, but their “authenticity” (that is, Pauline composition) is disputed over issues of vocabulary, style, and content. Their order in terms of scholarly acceptance from most likely Pauline to least is 2 Thessalonians (little doubt), Colossians and Ephesians (with the author of Ephesians dependant on Colossians), and the “Pastoral Epistles” of 1, 2 Timothy and Titus.

3. The Epistle to the Hebrews is traditionally associated with Paul, but it does not claim Pauline authorship.

C. In addition to questions of authenticity, we must also ask about the Epistles’ “integrity” (that is, is the form of the letter as we have it the same as what Paul originally wrote?).
   1. For example, 1 Thess. 2:14b–16, containing negative comments about Jews, may be an interpolation.
   2. In addition, 1 Cor. 14:33b–36, in which “Paul” exhorts women to be silent in churches, is sometimes seen as stemming from a later hand (such as that of the Pastorals’ author).

D. The letters cannot be traced before the time of their collection, c. 110 (suggested by Bishop Ignatius of Antioch), and the canonical order as it appears today emerged c. 150.

E. The letters are primarily ad hoc, and historians must reconstruct on the basis of content not only what Paul himself thought, but also what he thought his opponents were thinking.

II. Paul’s biography.

A. Paul was not, contrary to popular belief, driven neurotic by trying to fulfill an impossible law. Rather, he describes himself as “blameless before the Law” (Phil. 3:6).
   1. Was the “boasting” he describes his own satisfaction in living a halachically oriented life?
   2. In 1 Tim. 1:16, Paul identifies himself as the “foremost of sinners.”

B. Paul claims to be a Pharisee (see also Acts 22:3; a few scholars distrust the claim).

C. Paul regards himself as equal to (if not better than) those who knew “Christ in the flesh,” because he himself had seen the risen Jesus (see Gal. 1:13–25) and had participated in greater labors, with more imprisonments and countless floggings (see 2 Cor. 12:11).
   1. He claims that Peter is hypocritical for withdrawing from table fellowship with Gentiles (Gal. 2:11–13).
   2. He stresses his independence from James.
D. Yet his authority is often questioned, even as he questions the authority of others.
   1. In Corinth, he is accused of embezzling funds.
   2. He faces factionalism and rival apostles.

III. Paul’s views of the “Old Testament” and Judaism.

A. Paul is often regarded as the spoiler who turned a Jewish movement into a Gentile one and who shifted the movement’s focus from the proclamation of the Kingdom to the proclaimer.

B. Yet Paul always viewed himself as a Jew, and he saw his mission in complete continuity with Judaism, although he did realize others might construe his actions differently.
   1. Paul is very concerned to locate the Christ in Israel’s literature; see especially Galatians, where in good Jewish hermeneutical tradition, Paul plays with grammar (Abraham’s “seed”), allegorizes (Hagar and Sarah), and quotes earlier texts in support of his views (Habbakuk).
   2. Paul regards the “Old Testament” (here, an anachronistic term) as given by angels, through a mediator (Moses), and incapable of making one good. It was added “because of transgressions,” much as a pedagogue is obtained to train children.

C. Paul’s letters have been read to suggest that Judaism teaches “works- righteousness” (i.e., that one is saved by doing good works), but Jews perform the commandments because they are commanded by God and part of the covenant.

D. Paul insists that Gentiles are justified apart from the Law; most Jews would agree. The majority of Jews did not believe one had to be Jewish to be justified. They developed the seven “Noahide” commandments (based on Lev. 17–18), incumbent on all Gentiles (the lists vary): no murder, no consumption of “idol meat” or the limb from a living animal, no porneia, the recognition of the one God/no idolatry, no theft, no blasphemy, the mandate to establish just courts.
   1. There was, thus, a two-track system: one for Gentiles and another for Jews.
   2. E. P. Sanders argues that for Paul, Judaism’s problem is that it is not Christianity.
IV. Paul and eschatology.
   A. Eschatological views likely grounded Paul’s message (he was certain that the end-times had begun), prompted his views on the status quo (why change what God is about to renew?), and spurred his fervor.
   B. In 1 Thessalonians, Paul assures congregants that “The dead in Christ will rise first” (4:16), and the time will come “like a thief in the night” (5:2).
   C. Eschatological urgency is decreased in Romans and absent from the Pastoral Epistles.

V. Paul and women.
   A. Paul has been hailed as both proto-feminist and misogynistic chauvinist.
      1. On the one hand, he states that women should be silent in churches, be subordinate to their husbands, and wear veils while prophesying.
      2. On the other hand, he recognizes women as prophets, deacons, and (probably) apostles.
   B. Gal. 3:28 has been seen as liberating women, although both its social actualization (e.g., slavery was practiced in the Pauline churches) and its anthropological intent (e.g., did Paul idealize an androgynous view?) are debatable.
   C. The Deutero-Pauline letters (the Pastoral Epistles) formalize women’s removal from positions of authority, save for the instruction of younger women by older ones. Unlike the undebated Epistles, these texts favor marriage and procreation over celibacy in a non-eschatological context.

VI. Paul and slavery.
   A. According to his one (undebated) letter to an individual, Philemon, Paul returns an escaped slave to his master.
   B. He advises slaves to “remain in the state in which you are called” (1 Cor. 7:21–24).
   C. The Deutero-Pauline Epistles promote the obedience of slaves to masters (Eph. 6:4–9).
VII. Paul and the Christ.
   A. Whether Paul cared about the “historical Jesus” remains a debated question.
   B. Paul’s interest in Jesus primarily begins when he was “handed over” (1 Cor. 11:23).
   C. Phil. 2:5–11 proclaims the Christ’s preexistence and heavenly exaltation.

VIII. Theological legacy.
   A. Augustine (354–430) found in Paul support for his sexual ethic.
   B. Luther (1483–1546) developed from Romans his view of “justification by faith.”
   C. Calvin (1509–1564) found in Romans a predestinarian model of salvation.
   D. Wesley (1703–1791) found from reading Luther’s preface to Romans his heart “strangely warmed.”

Suggested Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. Would Paul regard James as a heretic? Would James so regard Paul?
2. To what extent is Paul a product of his cultural context?
3. How might we read Acts differently in light of the Pauline Epistles?
Lecture Twenty-Three
Jesus of Nazareth

Scope: This lecture begins with a summary of how Enlightenment views affected biblical scholarship and, thus, of how changes in scholarly method created changes in the understanding of Jesus. The first section of the discussion comments on the contributions of such methods as source criticism (theories on the relationship among the canonical gospels and the hypothesis of a no-longer-extant “Q” Gospel), form criticism (viewing the Gospel texts as community products, much like folktale{s, rather than objective reports), and redaction criticism (separating the evangelists’ contributions from the materials they received). We then move to current reconstructions of the “historical Jesus,” such as Cynic sage, rabbi, charismatic wonder-worker, liberation theologian, and proponent of “family values.” Our assessments are informed by Gospel accounts, other ancient sources (for example, Josephus, Dead Sea Scrolls, Talmud, pagan writers, and non-canonical Christian materials, such as the Gospel of Thomas), and cross-cultural comparisons.

Outline

I. The distinction between the “Jesus of history” and the “Christ of faith.”
   A. Source criticism.
      1. Given the apparent discrepancies among the Gospels, late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century biblical scholars attempted to separate the chaff of accretion from the wheat of historical truth.
      2. The development of the “four-source theory” and the argument of Marcan priority, coupled with the hypothesis of a Q source (responsible for the materials common to Matthew and Luke but absent from Mark), created initial optimism.
      3. Albert Schweitzer shows that the “lives of Jesus” are glimpses into a mirror, rather than windows into the past.
B. Form criticism.
   1. Templates from tradition.
      a. In Mark 4:35-41, the disciples fear drowning and call to Jesus, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” Jesus rebukes the disciples and the storm. The disciples wonder, “Who is he who can stop the winds?” Ps. 107:23–32 answers: “They cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he brought them out from their distress. He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed.”
      b. Matthew 2 establishes Jesus as a new Moses to Herod’s Pharaoh.
      c. John 6:25–59 (see Mark 6:31–56) makes explicit the connection between Moses’s providing manna and Jesus’ providing the “bread of life.”
      d. The synoptic passion draws from Psalm 22; John comments on hyssop, not breaking Jesus’ legs, and the “day of preparation” to show the “lamb of God” (see 1 Cor. 5:7).
      e. The story of Jesus recollects both Daniel 7 and Isaiah 53.
   2. Stories attach to famous figures.
   3. Stories are told for community benefit, apart from historical “truth.”

C. Redaction criticism.
   1. Once we recognize the evangelists as having their own agendas, we learn more about their views, even as we find it harder to locate the historical Jesus. For example, was the “Temple cleansing” at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry (John 2:13–22) or at the end, as the synoptics say?
   2. Mark stresses the suffering Messiah; Matthew, the new Moses and teacher; Luke, the champion of the poor; in John, Jesus is the “man from heaven” and incarnate Logos.
   3. For the Gospel of Thomas, Jesus reveals esoteric wisdom.

D. The writings of Josephus, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Talmud, pagan authors, and non-canonical Christian authors, as well as guidance from cultural anthropology, sociological theory, peasant structures, psycho-biography, politics, and so on, prove of varying use.
E. The criteria of authenticity and the third quest.
1. The criterion of dissimilarity or embarrassment appears relevant to Jesus’ baptism and statements on divorce, because we see Paul and the Gospel writers struggling with them.
   a. However, what appears to us as “embarrassing” may not have so appeared to all those who were Jesus’ immediate followers or first-century Jews.
   b. What seems to us “dissimilar” may be based on our own lack of information.
2. The criterion of multiple attestation supports the pronouncement on divorce and the institution of some form of memorial meal.
   a. However, we do not have certainty on which sources were known to which authors: Did Matthew know the letters of Paul? Did John have access to the synoptics?
   b. Even if a datum is multiply attested, this proves only anteriority, not historicity.

II. Models of Jesus.
A. Cynic sage.
   1. Because Jesus teaches with both parables and enigmatic sayings, he has been compared to Cynic philosophers, those who pique the status quo and challenge conventional values.
   2. There was at least one Cynic in the area of the Decapolis, but Jesus is understandable apart from a specific Cynic model.
B. Rabbi.
   1. Jesus is a rabbi in that he is recognized as a teacher with authority, is faithful to Torah, and so on, but he is not a member of, nor trained by, a rabbinic academy or school. Indeed, our information on “rabbinic” thought comes from sources that post-date the Gospels.
   2. Many of his concerns, such as the appropriate celebration of the Sabbath, the function of the Temple, accommodation with Rome, personal piety, an interest in table fellowship, belief in (at least a form of) resurrection, and others, are shared with Pharisees.
   3. Jesus is better located among the revitalization and apocalyptic movements of early Judaism, such as those gathered around John the Baptist or Qumran’s Teacher of
Righteousness. Thus, he is more apocalyptic-millenarian than “rabbi.”

C. Charismatic wonder-worker.
   1. Like Elijah and Elisha, Haninah ben Dosa, and Apollonius of Tyana, Jesus performed miraculous healings.
   2. Similarly, like Honi the Circle-Drawer, he could control the weather, spoke intimately with God, and spoke on his own authority.

D. Jesus does not directly challenge Rome, although he sought resistance through exhortations to “turn the other cheek,” “go the second mile,” and “give your shirt as well.”

E. Proponent of family values.
   1. Jesus values the Decalogue (with a re-identification of “mother” and “father”).
   2. Jesus decries divorce and especially remarriage. However, he does not appear to be doing social engineering to protect women from abusive divorce situations. His rationale is Genesis 2, not personal welfare.

III. The erasure of Jesus’ Judaism.

A. If we see Jesus in the context of Judaism, his action in the Temple makes greater sense: He may have been protesting Caiaphas’s moving of businesses into the courtyard itself (a protest also lodged by the Pharisees). The issue is reform, not abrogation.

B. Jesus argues with Pharisees over correct interpretation of Torah and, thus, behaves in a perfectly Jewish manner.

C. Jesus wears tzitzit, keeps the dietary regulations, visits synagogues, makes pilgrimages to Jerusalem, does not engage in a Gentile mission, gathers twelve followers to symbolize the twelve tribes of Israel, and sees himself as the fulfillment of Jewish yearnings for the Son of Man and the Kingdom of God.

Suggested Reading:

Mark Allan Powell, *Jesus as a Figure in History: How Modern Historians View the Man from Galilee*. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1998.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Where should the burden of proof lie in understanding Jesus: on those who claim the material is authentic or on those who claim it is not?

2. Does the “quest for the historical Jesus” support faith, undermine it, prove irrelevant to it?
Lecture Twenty-Four
The Christ of Faith

Scope: The New Testament and later theological writings offer more than a focus on Jesus’ words and deeds before his Crucifixion. They comment on his role in humanity’s salvation from death and sin, proclaim his descent to the underworld and ascension to heaven, and describe his return for a final judgment. This lecture looks at the various canonical and post-canonical understandings of the Christ (the discipline known as *christology*), including, from the New Testament, new Adam (Paul), preexistent divinity (Paul, John), high priest (Epistle to the Hebrews), suffering servant (1 Peter), slain lamb and warrior (Book of Revelation). We then look at select later understandings, including the development of the creeds, the formulation of the Trinity, and mystical visions of the Christ as mother who gives birth to and nurses the church. We conclude this series by noting what else can, and should, be studied, again and again (cf. John 21:25).

Outline

I. The Ascension is described in Acts and hinted at in John.
   A. The Ascension establishes ongoing christology as “spiritual” rather than political: “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel” (Acts 1:6; see Luke 9:11). As Jesus instructs his disciples, so God had instructed Moses for forty days on Sinai (Exod. 24:12–18; Acts 1:3).
   B. The ascended Christ is “at the right hand of the Father” (as Stephen witnesses), where he is “appointed by God judge of [the] living and of [the] dead” (Acts 10:42).
   C. Although the Christ does appear to Paul (Acts, Galatians), the Ascension decreases the expansion of direct commission and, thus, lends itself to apostolic authority.
   D. To establish new claims for revelation, newer Gospels frequently offer post-resurrectional or non-resurrectional revelations.
   E. That the ascended Christ should serve as intermediary and judge is not an alien idea to early Judaism: Similar roles were accorded to
Abel, Enoch, and the Maccabean martyrs. Ascensions and apotheosis traditions were also known in the pagan world, as we see from the Hercules and Dionysius myths.

II. New Adam.

A. As we’ve seen in interpretations based on the Johannine Resurrection scene, Jesus has been understood as a new Adam in a new “garden” (with Mary Magdalene as the new Eve).

B. Romans 5 also presents Jesus as the new Adam: “For just as by one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous” (5:19).
   1. This is the beginning of what eventually becomes the concept of Original Sin.
   2. Early Judaism had no set doctrine on the effect of Adam’s “fall”; according to one first-century Jewish apocalypse, “Each man is the Adam of his own soul.”
   3. The Pastorals appeal to the Eden story to promote procreation.

C. For Paul himself, the Christ has several roles.

D. Tradition eventually comes to identify Golgotha, “the place of the skull,” as the site of Adam’s burial. When the blood drawn from the crown of thorns and from the sword that pierced his side flows down Jesus’ body and onto Adam’s skull at the foot of the cross, humanity gains redemption.

III. Preexistence.

A. In conjunction with Jewish views of the Logos (Philo) and Wisdom (Hochmah, Sophia), the Christ is perceived to be involved in the act of creation.
   1. John 1:1–3 proclaims, “In the beginning was the Logos, and the Logos was with God, and the Logos was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him nothing came into being.”
      a. In ancient gynecological thought, the perfect fetus bore no female admixture but was the image and likeness of the father.
      b. Preexistence is reinforced as Jesus states, “Before Abraham was, I am” (8:58).
2. The “Christ Hymn” (Phil. 2:6–11) states that Christ Jesus “was in the form of God, [but] did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, and so emptied himself. …”
   a. This leads to the *kenosis,* the emptying out of divinity into humanity.
   b. The Christ is, thereby, both divine and humble, lordly and lowly.
   c. As Anselm later put it, “Christ became man so that man could become God.”

3. Of Wisdom, Prov. 8:22–23, 30–31 states, “The Lord created me at the beginning/as the beginning of His way, the first of His acts of long ago. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. … I was beside Him, like a master builder [or “little child”], and I was daily [His] delight.”

B. The idea of a second divine being was not seen by all Jews to compromise monotheism, although they recognized its potential to do so. “Metatron,” found, among other places, in 3 Enoch, provides one example. Philo’s *Logos* and the Wisdom tradition offer others.

C. Even Paul indicates that the Christ is finally subordinate to God: “Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. For as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ … Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power.” (1 Cor. 15:20–25).

IV. The Epistle to the Hebrews emphasizes the role of the Christ as eternal high priest and, thus, adds a sacerdotal aspect to the more prevalent royal christology.

A. The Epistle begins by explaining why the Christ is superior to angels, Moses, Abraham, and the Levites.

B. Through his priesthood in the “order of Melchizedek” (Heb. 5:6, citing Ps. 110:4), the Christ has an eternal role superior to the Jewish cultus.
   1. He “had no father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the son of God, he remains a priest forever” (Heb. 7:3).
   2. Hebrews, thus, does not find a need to associate Jesus with the Davidic line.
C. The Christ is both sacrifice and sacrificer, his blood is more valuable than that of bulls and goats, and his sacrifice needed to be performed only once.

D. As high priest, Jesus continues to make intercession for humanity at the heavenly altar.

V. Revelation offers several portraits of the Christ, all in highly symbolic images.
   A. The “slain lamb” recollects the Johannine “lamb of God,” as well as the Paschal sacrifice.
   B. He serves as the “bridegroom” to the heavenly Jerusalem.

VI. The appropriation of pagan ideas began as the church expressed itself in a language non-Jews could understand.
   A. The most notable examples of such appropriations are post-biblical.
   B. The Latin church of the third and fourth centuries celebrated the birth of Jesus on December 25, the traditional feast of the sun god, Sol Invictus; thus, they were able to retain a popular festival but strip it of its pagan origins.

VII. Creeds became necessary as distinct christological images developed: Was Jesus more human than divine (Arianism), more divine than human (Gnosticism, Docetism); did the Divine Christ suffer on the cross (“no,” said Cerinthus); what is the relationship among the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; did Christians believe in three gods?

VIII. Jesus and spiritual nourishment.
   A. Christus Lactans, or the nursing Christ, is known especially from the writings of medieval mystics, but it has its origins in the Odes of Solomon, a first-century hymnal.

IX. John 21:25, and the many more words that can be written. …
   A. We might explore characters not addressed: the numerous people healed, the New Testament’s depictions of Satan and angels, the additional christological pictures.
   B. We might study the Bible in art and literature or even in “Jesus” movies (better are the PBS and Arts and Entertainment network offerings).
C. The study of particular themes—the role of women, slavery, the relation of the church to the state, the view of healing and sickness, economic theory, apocalyptic vision, the approach to the pagan mission, the question of anti-Judaism, the role of God, and many more—will continue to occupy students of the New Testament.

D. Throughout, theological, christological, and soteriological questions should present themselves (regardless of our confessional stance), because the texts are designed to convey what their authors regarded as religious truths. Thus, we must always make moral choices: What is culturally limited and what is universal? What must be believed in order to be “Christian” and what can be dropped?

E. Finally, we should interpret these texts in light of our own beliefs, experiences, and values: We will find ever-new interpretations. We should then test these interpretations against what the past 2,000 years’ worth of interpreters have already said: We will find that the meanings gained from the text are inexhaustible. (And, if you wish, please share them with me.)

Suggested Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. What would the world be like today had Jesus not been born? Had he not become recognized as divine?
2. Is it a good idea to depict Jesus as an embodiment of the range of human appearances, or should he be depicted as closely as possible to what he actually looked like? In what sense is he, or can he be, multicultural?
3. Should the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith be distinguished? Can they be?
Timeline

B.C.E./B.C.*

2100–1550 ** ................................... Abraham, Sarah and Hagar, Jacob, Joseph.

1400 ........................................... Moses.

1000–900 ...................................... David and Solomon.

722 ................................................ Assyrian conquest of Israel; dispersal of the ten northern tribes.

587 ................................................ Babylonian exile; destruction of Solomon’s Temple.

333 ................................................ Alexander the Great.

167–65 .......................................... Maccabean revolt.

165–63 ........................................... Hasmonean rule.

63 .................................................. Rome gains control of Hasmonean land.

40–4 ............................................. Rule of Herod the Great.

c. 20–50 C.E. ............................. Philo of Alexandria.

c. 4 ................................................. Birth of Jesus.


C.E.

6 .................................................. Roman census; revolt of Judas the Galilean.

* B.C. is the abbreviation for “before Christ”; B.C.E. stands for “before the Christian era” or “before the common era” and provides a non-confessional means for identifying dates. Similarly, A.D. indicates the Latin anno Domini, which means, “year of our Lord.” The non-confessional alternative is C.E., for “common era” or “Christian era.”

** All rounded numbers are approximate.
14–37 ................................. Rule of Tiberius.
26–36 ................................. Governorship of Pontius Pilate.
c. 30 ................................. Crucifixion of Jesus.
c. 33–35 ................................. Paul of Tarsus becomes an evangelist for the church.
37–40 ................................. Rule of Caligula.
c. 37–c. 100 ........................ Flavius Josephus.
41–54 ................................. Rule of Claudius.
41–44 ................................. Herod Agrippa I.
c. 49–60 ................................. Paul’s Epistles.
50–100 ................................. Herod Agrippa II.
54–68 ................................. Rule of Nero.
56–117 ................................. Tacitus.
c. 60–130 ........................ Papias.
c. 61–c. 112 ........................ Pliny.
64 ................................. Great fire of Rome (traditional date for the deaths of Peter and Paul).
66–70 ................................. First Jewish revolt against Rome.
70 ................................. Destruction of the Second (Herod’s) Temple.
c. 70 ................................. Gospel of Mark.
c. 90 ................................. Gospel of John.
d. c. 98 ................................. Apollonius of Tyana.
c. 100 ................................. Acts of the Apostles.
c. 100–165 ........................ Justin Martyr.
c. 130–c. 200 ........................ Irenaeus of Lyon.
c. 140 .............................................. Marcion arrives in Rome.
c. 160–c. 225 ................................... Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullian.
c. 185–c. 254 ................................. Origen of Alexandria.
c. 200 ........................................... Codification of the Mishna.
313 ................................................ Constantine legalizes Christianity
(Edict of Milan).
325 ................................................ Council of Nicea.
c. 345–420 ................................. St. Jerome.
354–430 ........................................ St. Augustine.
540–604 ................................. Pope Gregory the Great.
1483–1546 ................................. Martin Luther.
1509–1564 ................................. John Calvin.
1854 ................................................ Proclamation of the Doctrine of the
Immaculate Conception.
1875–1965 ................................. Albert Schweitzer.
1945–1946 ................................. Discovery of the Nag Hammadi texts.
1947 ................................................ Discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls.
1950 ................................................ Proclamation of the Doctrine of the
Assumption of the Virgin.
Glossary

**A.D.: Anno Domini**, “in the year of our Lord” (see C.E.).

**apocalyptic**: From the Greek for “revelation” or “uncovering”; a type of literature, often ascribed to an ancient worthy, with a concern for heavenly secrets, substantial use of symbolism, and frequently, an eschatological focus (for example, the Book of Revelation).

**Apocrypha**: From the Greek for “hidden,” a term designating the books written by Jews during Hellenistic and Roman times (c. 200 B.C.E.–100 C.E.), included in the LXX and which became canonical for Catholic and Orthodox Christianity. See also deuterocanonical texts.

**apostle**: From the Greek for “sent out,” the term was used by the church to designate Jesus’ twelve select disciples (so Luke) or any who proclaimed the Christian message.

**Aramaic**: A Semitic language closely related to Hebrew and Syriac; parts of the books of Daniel and Ezra are in Aramaic.

**Assumption of the Virgin**: Doctrine that proclaims that at her death, the Virgin Mary was assumed, or taken up, bodily into heaven.

**B.C.:** Before Christ (see B.C.E.).

**B.C.E.:** Before the common era or before the Christian era; a non-confessional expression for B.C.

**Beloved Disciple**: Anonymous figure, traditionally associated with John the son of Zebedee, on whose authority the Fourth Gospel rests.

**Canaan**: The geographical area between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea; in Genesis, God promises it to Abraham and his descendants. The region was later called Palestine.

**canon**: From the Greek for “reed, measuring stick, plumb line,” the list of books considered inspired or official; the foundation documents of a community.

**C.E.:** Common era or Christian era; a non-confessional expression for A.D.

**Christ**: Greek for “anointed one”; it translates the Hebrew meshiach, or “messiah.”
Christology: Teachings about the nature of the Christ.

church fathers: The teachers of the second century onward, such as Tertullian, Origen, Jerome, and Eusebius.

circumcision: The removal of the foreskin; the initiation ritual (for men) into the covenant community and, thus, the sign of the covenant.

codex (pl. codices): The book form as opposed to a scroll.

criteria of authenticity: Techniques by which scholars propose to sift authentic Jesus material from the additions made by the early church or the evangelists.

deacon: From the Greek for “serve,” a church office.

Dead Sea Scrolls: Ancient Jewish documents found in 1947 and subsequently in caves near the Dead Sea (see Qumran), including numerous copies of biblical books (except for Esther) and commentaries on them.

Deuterocanonical texts: The “second part” of the canon of the Old Testament; an alternative designation by Catholic and (Christian) Orthodox churches for the (Old Testament) Apocrypha. See apocrypha.

Deutero-Pauline Epistles: Letters ascribed to Paul in the canon but whose Pauline authorship is disputed by scholars (Colossians, Ephesians, 2 Thessalonians).

diaspora: Greek for “dispersion”; from the Babylonian exile to the present, any place outside of Israel where Jews live.

eschatology: Literally, words concerning the end; material describing the end of an age or of time and often involving the in-breaking of divine rule.

Essenes: A Jewish movement, often associated with the Dead Sea Scrolls, marked by an eschatological orientation.

exegesis: From the Greek for “to lead out”; critical interpretation of biblical material.


Gnosticism: A diverse, ancient religious movement, related to Christianity, that promoted a dualistic worldview; many Gnostics viewed the deity of
Genesis as a “demi-urge,” an inept being who seeks to withhold knowledge (gnosis) from humanity.

**Hasmoneans**: From Hasmon, the grandfather of Judah Maccabee; another name for the Maccabees, usually used in reference to the dynasty they founded.

**Hebrew**: A Semitic language in which most of the Old Testament/TaNaK is written; a designation for the covenant community from the Patriarchal period until the Babylonian exile, perhaps derived from the Hebrew “to cross over.”

**Hellenism**: Greek thought and culture brought to the East by the conquests of Alexander the Great.

**hermeneutics**: Term derived from the Greek god Hermes; biblical interpretation related to exegesis but often with the connotation of involving the presuppositions and goals of the interpreter.

**Immaculate Conception**: Doctrine that proclaims that the Virgin Mary was conceived without the taint of Original Sin.

**Levites**: Priestly group of Temple workers.

**logos**: Greek for “word,” the Stoic principal of reason that provided coherence to the world; for Hellenistic Jews, such as Philo, the mediating entity between God and the world; for the Gospel of John, the preexistent Christ.

**LXX**: Abbreviation for the septuagint, the Greek translation of the TaNaK; the designation “seventy” comes from the legend that the translation was produced by seventy scribes from Jerusalem.

**Maccabees**: Jewish family who led the rebellion against Antiochus IV Epiphanes in 167 B.C.E.

**Marcion**: Second-century Christian whose canon included select Pauline Epistles and a copy of Luke’s Gospel minus Old Testament references; he argued that the deity of the Old Testament was not the deity revealed by the Christ.

**Masoretic text (MT)**: The received form of the TaNaK; edited and standardized by the Masoretes, Jewish scholars who added “points” (that is, vowels), circa the seventh to ninth centuries C.E.
**Messiah**: Hebrew for “anointed” (Greek: *Christos*).

**midrash** (pl. *midrashim*): Jewish expansion and/or explanation of biblical texts.

**mishna**: Collection of Jewish laws codified circa 200; part of the **Talmud**.

**Nag Hammadi**: Egyptian village where, in 1945, a collection of Gnostic writings was discovered.

**Nazirite**: An individual consecrated to God, usually for a specific period, whose practices include abstaining from wine and alcohol, avoiding corpses, and eschewing haircuts.

**Nevi’im**: Hebrew for “Prophets”; the second division of the **TaNaK**.

**Noachide Laws**: Jewish legend positing that seven laws were given to Noah to provide Gentile nations with a moral code.

**parousia**: From the Greek for “presence” or “coming,” the “second coming” of Jesus.

**Passover**: Jewish celebration (pilgrimage festival during the times of the Jerusalem Temple) commemorating the Exodus from Egypt and freedom from slavery.

**Pastoral Epistles**: First and Second Timothy and Titus, all ascribed to Paul but whose authenticity is questioned.

**Pentateuch**: From the Greek for “five scrolls,” the first five biblical books, the **Torah**.

**pericope**: From the Greek for “to cut around,” a narrative unit that can be analyzed apart from its literary context (such as a story, poem, or saying).

**pseudonymity**: The practice of writing under the name of an ancient worthy.

**Q**: A (hypothetical) document believed to have provided material to Matthew and Luke (such as the Lord’s Prayer and the Beatitudes).

**Qumran**: Area where the **Dead Sea Scrolls** were found.

**Samaritans**: The population of the former Northern Kingdom of Israel following the deportation by Assyria of many Israelites and the resettling in Samaria of peoples from elsewhere in the Assyrian empire.
Second Temple period: Judaism from the beginning of Persian rule to the destruction of the Temple by Rome in 70 C.E.

septuagint: See LXX.

Sicarii: From the Latin for “daggermen,” a Jewish anti-Roman band known for assassinating collaborators.

Son of Man: A human being (Ezek., Pss.); in Dan. 7:13, the symbol of the covenant community who appears in the heavenly throne room and who is given earthly rule; Jesus’ preferred self-designation.

Sophia: Greek for “wisdom”: the personification of wisdom in female form.

synagogue: From the Greek for “to gather together,” a place where Jews assemble for prayer, worship, and other community activities.

synoptic Gospels: The Gospels ascribed to Matthew, Mark, and Luke, which “together” (syn) “see” (optic) in that they tell what is, in general, the same story (in distinction from John’s Gospel).

synoptic problem: The determination of the relationship among the synoptic Gospels (that is, which sources depend on which).

Talmud: A compendium of Jewish law and lore consisting of the Mishna and the Gemara; the Babylonian Talmud was codified circa 700 C.E.; the Palestinian, circa 400 C.E.

TaNaK (Tanak, Tanakh): Acronym for “Torah, Nevi’im, Ketuvim”; a way of designating the canon used by the synagogue.

Torah: Hebrew for “instruction” or “law”; the first five books of the Bible (sometimes called the “Books of Moses”).

type scene: A literary convention; manipulation of the conventional elements entertainingly reveals character development; examples include the “woman at the well” and “annunciations.”

vulgate: From the Latin for “common,” St. Jerome’s translation of the Hebrew canon into Latin in 405 C.E.
Bibliography

Series and Journals:

* **Bible Review.** Scholarly articles and excellent illustrations intermixed with columns on pastoral, theological, and political issues; book reviews; advertisements; and peppery letters to the editor.

* **Biblical Archaeology Review.** Up-to-date studies written by professionals but without obscurantist jargon.


* **Interpretation** series, Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox. A “Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching” that combines historical-critical insight with comments on reception by the church and contemporary pastoral issues.

* **New Interpreter’s Bible** series, Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press. Designed for scholars, pastors, and laity, the commentaries offer two translations, exegetical observations, and hermeneutical reflections.

* **What Are They Saying about….?.** series, New York: Paulist Press. Excellent introductory studies of individual books in the New Testament, as well as major pericopae and themes.

Reference Works:

* Denotes key texts for further research


* **Freedman, David Noel, ed. The Anchor Bible Dictionary.** 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992. Detailed articles on characters, locations, themes, and archaeological sites; seen by many today as the standard in the field of biblical studies.


Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2000. The only compendium in which anonymous characters often lacking their own dictionary entries (such as Philip’s daughters, the Syro-Phoenician woman, the woman at the well, and Pilate’s wife) receive distinct treatment.

Suggested Reading, General Studies:

Specific works are cited in the Suggested Reading for each lecture and listed below. In addition, readers may find these general studies helpful.


Suggested Reading, Specific Studies:


———. *Jesus as a Figure in History: How Modern Historians View the Man from Galilee*. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1998.


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