CHAPTER 7

Mark's Portrait of Jesus

The Hidden Messiah and Eschatological Judge

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give up his life as a ransom for many. Mark 10:45

Key Topics/Themes Between about 64 CE, when Nero began Rome's first official persecution of Christians, and 70 CE, when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem (along with its Temple and the original apostolic church), the Christian community faced a series of crises that threatened its survival. Responding to the wars, revolts, and persecutions that afflicted his group, Mark composed what appears to be the earliest narrative account of Jesus' public career, presenting Jesus' story in a way that was strikingly relevant to the precarious circumstances of Mark's intended readers. Mark's Gospel thus portrays a Jesus who faces attack on three crucial fronts: from Jewish religious leaders, local (Herodian) rulers, and Roman officials. Painting Jesus as a "hidden Messiah" who was misunderstood and devalued by his contemporaries, Mark emphasizes that Jesus came to serve, to suffer, and to die—but also ultimately to triumph by submitting fully to the divine will.

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The shortest and probably the earliest of the four canonical Gospels, the narrative "According to Mark" contains relatively few of Jesus' teachings. Instead, the author—who was the first to call his written account an *evangelion* (gospel)—presents Jesus as a miracle-working man of action who is almost constantly on the move, dashing from village to village in Galilee and adjacent regions and, finally, journeying to Jerusalem for a fatal confrontation with its religious and political authorities. Mark's Jesus announces God's kingdom, exorcizes demons, heals the sick, and voluntarily sacrifices himself for others.

Mark's Historical Setting

Several critical methods are helpful in studying **Mark,** beginning with historical investigation of the Gospel's authorship, date, place of composition, possible sources, and social and religious environment (see Figure 7.1). The earliest reference to Mark's Gospel comes from Papias, a Christian writer who was bishop of Hierapolis in Asia Minor about 130–140 CE (see Box 7.1). As quoted by Eusebius, Papias states that Mark had been a disciple of the apostle **Peter** in Rome and based his account on Peter's reminiscences

The Gospel According to Mark

Author: Traditionally John Mark, traveling companion of Paul and "interpreter" for Peter in Rome. The writer does not identify himself in the Gospel text, and scholars, unable to verify the mid-second century tradition of Markan authorship, regard the work as anonymous.

Date: About 66–70 CE, during the Jewish Revolt against Rome.

Place of composition: Rome or Syria-Palestine.

Sources: Primarily oral tradition. Many scholars believe that Mark used a few written sources, such as a collection of Jesus' parables (ch. 4), a compilation of apocalyptic prophecies (ch. 13), and, perhaps, an older account of Jesus' arrest, trial, and execution (chs. 14–15).

Audience: Gentile Christians suffering persecution.

of Jesus. Papias notes that Mark "had not heard the Lord or been one of his followers" so that his Gospel lacked "a systematic arrangement of the Lord's sayings" (Eusebius, *History* 3.39).

Besides his intention to link Mark's Gospel to apostolic testimony, a consistent trend among church leaders during the second century CE, Papias makes two important historical observations: The author of Mark was *not* an eyewitness but depended on secondhand oral preaching, and Mark's version of Jesus' activities is "not in [proper chronological] order." Careful scrutiny of Mark's Gospel has convinced most New Testament scholars that it does not derive from a single apostolic source, such as Peter, but is based on a general body of oral teachings about Jesus preserved in the author's community.

Mark's author offers few hints about where or for whom he wrote, except for his insistence that following Jesus requires a willingness to suffer for one's faith. Mark's near equation of discipleship with suffering suggests that he directed his work to a group that was then undergoing severe testing and needed encouragement to remain steadfast (see Mark 8:34–38; 10:38–40). This theme of "carrying one's cross" may derive from the effects of Nero's persecution (c. 64–65 CE), when numerous Roman Christians were crucified

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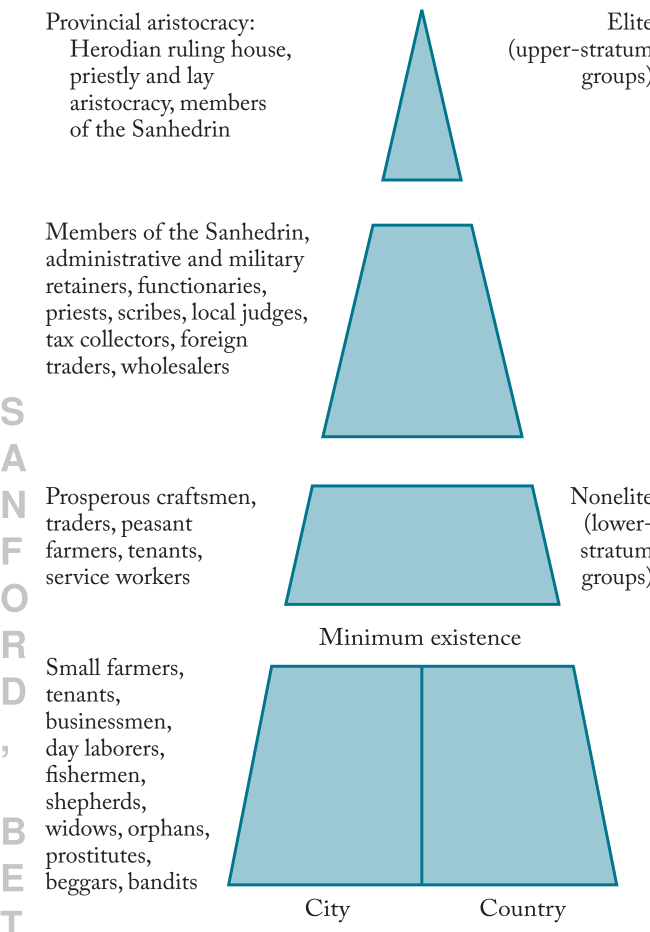

FIGURE 7.1 Social Pyramid 2: Social Stratification of Jewish Society in the Land of Israel (Without Religious Groups). In Jesus' day, Jewish society was sharply divided between two unequal groups: a powerful elite, representing a tiny percentage of the total population, and the nonelite masses. Whereas the elite upper stratum, such as the Roman-appointed Herodian kings, aristocratic chief priests, and large landowners, enjoyed the privileges of political influence, wealth, and prestige, the lower stratum, encompassing the vast majority of the population, lacked access to power or social privilege. Nonelite groups ranged from some relatively prosperous artisans, small farmers, and merchants to large numbers of landless day laborers whose families existed in utter penury. Many of Jesus' parables deal with the social and economic inequities that pervaded his society. See also Figure 5.7 for the pyramidal structure of Roman society. (Pyramid figure is reprinted from *The Jesus Movement* by Ekkehard W. Stegemann and Wolfgang Stegemann, English translation by O. C. Dean, Jr., copyright © 1999 Fortress Press. Used by permission of Augsburg Fortress.)

BOX 7.1 Papias on the Origin of Mark's Gospel

The oldest surviving reference to Mark's authorship of the Gospel bearing his name comes from Papias, who was a bishop of Hierapolis about 130 or 140 CE. An early church historian, Eusebius of Caesarea, quotes Papias as writing that an unnamed presbyter (church elder) was his source:

> This, too, the presbyter used to say. "Mark, who had been Peter's interpreter, wrote down carefully, but not in order, all that he remembered of the Lord's sayings and doings. For he had not heard the Lord or been one of his followers, but later, as I said, one of Peter's. Peter used to adapt his teachings to the occasion, without making a systematic arrangement of the Lord's sayings, so that Mark was quite justified in writing down some things just as he remembered them. For he had one purpose only—to leave out nothing that he had heard, and to make no misstatement about it."
> (Eusebius, *The History of the Church* 3.39)

Eusebius also quotes Papias's declaration that he preferred to learn Christian traditions from the testimony of persons who had known Jesus' companions rather than from written documents, such as the Gospels:

> And whenever anyone came who had been a follower of the presbyters, I inquired into the words of the presbyters, what Andrew or Peter had said, or Philip or Thomas or James or John or Matthew, or any other disciple of the Lord, and what Aristion and the presbyter John, disciples of the Lord, were still saying. For I did not imagine that things out of books would help me as much as the utterances of a living and abiding voice.
> (Eusebius, *The History of the Church* 3.39)

Although Papias is a relatively early witness to the Christian tradition, scholars caution that we have no means of verifying the historicity of his claims.

or burned alive. Papias and Irenaeus, another early church leader, agree that Mark wrote shortly after Peter's martyrdom, which, according to tradition, occurred during Nero's attack on Rome's Christian community.

Although Rome is the traditional place of composition, a growing number of scholars think it more likely that Mark wrote for an audience in Syria or Palestine. Critics favoring a Palestinian origin point to Mark's emphasis on the Jewish Revolt (66–73 CE) and concurrent warnings to believers who were affected by the uprising (Mark 13; see Box 7.6). In Mark's view, the "tribulation" climaxing in Jerusalem's destruction is the sign heralding Jesus' **Parousia,** or return in heavenly glory. The association of wars and national revolts with persecution of believers and Jesus' **Second Coming** gives an eschatological urgency to Mark's account.

Even though Papias and other second-century writers ascribe the Gospel to John Mark, a companion of Peter and Paul (Philem. 24; Col. 4:10; Acts 12:12–25; 14:36–40), the author does not identify himself in the text. The superscription—"The Gospel According to Mark"—is a later church embellishment, for second-century churchmen tried to connect extant writings about Jesus with apostles or their immediate disciples. The Gospel is anonymous; for convenience, we refer to the author as Mark.

Mark's Puzzling Attitude Toward Jesus' Close Associates

Jesus' Family

If scholars are right about assigning the Gospel to a time when the Jewish War against Rome had already begun and the Temple was expected to fall, most of the adult generation that had known Jesus was no longer alive. Even forty years after Jesus' death, however, there must have been some persons who had heard the disciples preach or who had known members of Jesus' family. James, whom Paul calls "the Lord's brother" (Gal. 1:19), was head of the Jerusalem church until his martyrdom in about 62 CE (Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.9; Acts 12:17; 15:13–21;

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BOX 7.2 Mark's Leading Characters*

John the Baptist (1:4–9); executed (6:17–29)
Jesus introduced (1:9); final words (15:34)
Simon Peter and his brother Andrew (1:16–18); Peter's imperfect discipleship (8:27–33; 9:2–6; 14:26–31, 66–72)
James and John, the fishermen sons of Zebedee (1:19–20); wish to be first in the kingdom (10:35–45)
Levi (Matthew), a tax collector (2:13–17)
The Twelve (3:13–19)
Judas Iscariot, Jesus' betrayer (3:19; 14:17–21, 43–46)
Mary, Jesus' mother, and other family members (3:20–21, 31–35; 6:3)
The Gerasene demoniac (5:1–20)
Herod Antipas, ruler of Galilee (ruled 4 BCE–39 CE) (6:17–29; 8:15)
The Syrophoenician (Canaanite) woman (7:14–30)
A rich young man (10:17–22)
The woman who anoints Jesus at Bethany (14:3–9)
The High Priest Caiaphas (14:53–64)
Pontius Pilate, prefect of Judea (governed 26–36 CE) (15:1–15, 43–44)
Barabbas, the terrorist released in place of Jesus (15:6–15)
Simon of Cyrene, the man impressed to carry Jesus' cross (15:21)
Joseph of Arimathaea, the Sanhedrin member who buries Jesus (15:42–46)
Mary of Magdala (in Galilee) (15:40–41, 47; 16:1)
Mary, mother of James and Joseph (15:40, 47; 16:1)

*Characters are listed in general order of appearance, along with the chief quality or event that distinguishes them in Mark's narrative.

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21:16), making him a contemporary of Mark. Through his surviving associates, James presumably would have been an invaluable source of information when Mark began compiling data for a biography of Jesus.

Strangely, Mark does not seem to have regarded Jesus' relatives—or any other ordinary source a modern biographer would consult—as worthy informants. One of the author's prevailing themes is his negative presentation of virtually everyone associated with the historical Jesus. (Box 7.2 lists Mark's leading characters.) From "his mother and brothers" (3:31) to his most intimate followers, Mark portrays all of Jesus' companions as oblivious to his real nature and/or as obstacles to his work. Mark's Gospel consistently renders all Jesus' Palestinian associates as incredibly obtuse, unable to grasp his teachings, and blind to his value.

The Markan picture of Jesus' family implies that they, too, failed to appreciate or support him: "When his relatives heard of this [his drawing large crowds around him], they set out to take charge of him, convinced he was out of his mind" (3:21, Jerusalem Bible). When "his mother and his brothers" send a message asking for him, apparently demanding that he cease making a public spectacle of himself, Mark has Jesus declare "whoever does the will of God is my brother, my sister, my mother." This is a startling repudiation of his blood ties and an implication that in the Markan Jesus' view, his relatives were not doing the divine will (3:31–35). The force of this antifamily episode is intensified because Mark uses it to frame a controversy in which Jesus' opponents accuse him of expelling demons by the power of Beelzebub, another name for the devil. Jesus countercharges that those who oppose his work are defying the **Holy Spirit** (God's presence active in human life), an "unforgivable sin" (3:22–30). At this point in the narrative, Mark shows Jesus' family attempting to interrupt his ministry, thus subtly associating them with his adversaries (see also John 7:1–9).

Mark also depicts Jesus' acquaintances in **Nazareth** as hostile to a local carpenter's

unexpected emergence as prophet and healer, questioning his credentials as sage and teacher. "Where does he get it from?" his neighbors ask. "'What wisdom is this that has been given him?' and 'How does he work such miracles? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James and Joseph and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?' So they [turned against] him" (6:2–3). In this incident in which Jesus revisits his home turf, Mark argues that those who thought they knew Jesus best doubted not only his right to be a religious leader but also his legitimacy—note Mark's reference to "the son of Mary," a contrast to the biblical custom of identifying a son through his male parentage even if his father was dead. The Nazarenes' refusal to see any merit in him results in a troubling diminution of Jesus' power: "He *could work no miracle there*" except for some routine healings (6:6; emphasis added). Mark thus seems to dismiss both family and hometown citizens as acceptable channels of biographical tradition: They all fail to trust, comprehend, or cooperate with his hero.

Mark's allusion to Jesus' "brothers" and "sisters" (see also Matt. 13:54–56) may disturb some readers. Because his Gospel does not include a tradition of Jesus' virginal conception or birth, the existence of siblings may not have been an issue with the Markan community (as it apparently was not for the Pauline churches; none of Paul's letters allude to a virgin birth). Matthew, however, explicitly affirms that Jesus was virginally conceived (Matt. 1:18–25), and Luke strongly implies it (Luke 1:26–38). Some Protestant Christians believe that, following Jesus' delivery, his mother may have borne other children in the ordinary way. According to Roman Catholic doctrine, however, Mary remains perpetually virgin. Jesus' "brothers" (translating the Greek *adelphoi*) are to be understood as close male relatives, perhaps cousins or stepbrothers (sons of Mary's husband, Joseph, by a previous marriage). (An apocryphal infancy Gospel, the Protevangelium of James, which probably dates from the second century CE, depicts James as Jesus' older stepbrother and Mary as eternally virgin; see Chapter 20.)

The Disciples

Mark's opinion of the Galilean **disciples** whom Jesus calls to follow him (3:13–19) is distinctly unsympathetic, although these are the Twelve Apostles on whose testimony the Christian faith is traditionally founded. Almost without exception, Mark paints the Twelve as dull-witted, inept, unreliable, cowardly, and, in at least one case, treacherous. When Jesus stills a storm, the disciples are impressed but unaware of the act's significance (4:35–41). After his feeding of the multitudes, the disciples "had not understood the intent of the loaves" because "their minds were closed" (6:52). The harshness of Mark's judgment is better rendered in the phrase "their hearts were hardened" (as given in the New Revised Standard Version). This is the same phrase used to describe the Egyptian pharaoh when he arrogantly "hardened his heart" and refused to obey Yahweh's commands (Exod. 7:14–10:27). After listening for months to Jesus' teaching, the disciples are such slow learners that they are still ignorant of "what [Jesus' reference to] 'rising from the dead' could mean" (9:9–10). Not only do they fail to grasp the concept of sharing in Jesus' glory (10:35–41), but even the simplest, most obvious parables escape their comprehension (4:10–13). As Jesus asks, "You do not understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable?" (4:13).

Although he has "explained everything" (4:33–34; see also 8:31–32), and the disciples have presumably recognized him as the Messiah (8:27–32), they desert him after his arrest (14:30). Peter, who had earlier acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah, three times denies knowing him (14:66–72). Almost the only character in Mark shown as recognizing the significance of Jesus' death is an unnamed Roman soldier who perceives that "truly this man was a son of God!" (15:39).

Mark's recurring motif that all of Jesus' original associates, including family, former neighbors,

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and followers, were almost preternaturally blind to his true identity and purpose carries through to the end of his Gospel. At the empty tomb, an unnamed youth in white directs a handful of women disciples not to linger in Jerusalem but to seek their Lord in Galilee, but they are too frightened to obey (16:1–8). The Gospel thus ends with the only disciples who had followed Jesus to the cross—a few Galilean women—inarticulate with terror, unable to cope with the news of his resurrection!

Mark's view that the resurrected Jesus will not be found near his burial site—Jerusalem—contrasts with the Lukan tradition that Jesus instructed his followers to remain in Jerusalem awaiting the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:47–53; Acts 1–2). Whereas Luke makes Jerusalem the center of Christian growth and expansion, the Spirit-empowered mother church led by Peter and James, Jesus' "brother" (Acts 1:4–3:34; 15:13–21; 21:16), Mark paints it as a hotbed of conniving hypocrites who scheme to murder the Son of God.

Mark's antipathy toward the historical Jesus' closest associates and the original Jerusalem church is puzzling. Does this apparent hostility mean that the group for which Mark wrote wished to distance itself from the Jerusalem community, whose founders included Jesus' closest family members, Mary and James (Acts 1:14; 12:17, etc.)? Does Mark's negative attitude indicate a power struggle between his branch of Gentile Christianity and the Jewish Christians who (until 70 CE) headed the original church? Some scholars caution that one should not necessarily postulate a historical tension between the Markan community and Palestinian Jewish Christians. Ancient historians and biographers commonly portray their heroes as enormously superior to their peers, depicting a subject's followers or disciples as constitutionally incapable of rising to his level of thought or achievement. Writing in this literary tradition, Mark may have emphasized the deficiencies of Jesus' contemporaries to underscore his hero's unique status: By magnifying Jesus' image, Mark demonstrates that Jesus alone does God's work and declares God's will.

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Mark as a Literary Narrative

Organization and Bipolar Structure

Whatever the historicity of Mark's version of Jesus' career, it eventually exerted a tremendous influence on the Christian community at large, primarily through the expanded and revised editions of Mark that Matthew and Luke produced (see Chapter 6). Because the two other Synoptic Gospels generally follow Mark's order of events in Jesus' life, it is important to understand the significance of Mark's bipolar organization. Mark arranges his narrative around a geographical north–south polarity. The first half of his narrative takes place in **Galilee** and adjacent areas of northern Palestine, a largely rural area of peasant farmers where Jesus recruits his followers, performs numerous miracles, and—despite some opposition—enjoys considerable success. The second half (after ch. 8) relates Jesus' fatal journey southward to Judea and Jerusalem, where he is rejected and killed (see Figure 7.2). Besides dividing Jesus' career according to two distinct geographical areas, Mark's Gospel presents two contrasting aspects of Jesus' story. In Galilee, Jesus is a figure of power, using his supernatural gifts to expel demons, heal the sick, control natural forces, and raise the dead. The Galilean Jesus speaks and acts with tremendous authority, effortlessly refutes his detractors, and affirms or invalidates the Mosaic Torah at will. Before leaving **Caesarea Philippi,** however, Jesus makes the first of three Passion predictions, warning his uncomprehending disciples that he will go to Jerusalem only to suffer humiliation and death (8:30–38; 9:31–32; 10:33–34).

By using the Passion predictions as a device to link the indomitable miracle worker in Galilee with the helpless figure on the cross in Judea, Mark reconciles the two seemingly irreconcilable components in his portrait of Jesus. The powerful Son of God who astonishes vast crowds with his mighty works is also the vulnerable Son of Man who, in weakness and apparent

FIGURE 7.2 Political divisions of Palestine during the ministry of Jesus (c. 30 CE). Note that Rome directly administered Judea and Samaria through its governor Pontius Pilate; Herod Antipas ruled Galilee (Jesus' home district) and Peraea; another son of Herod the Great, Philip, ruled an area to the northeast. The Decapolis was a league of ten Greek-speaking cities on the east side of the Jordan River.

BOX 7.3 Mark's Order of Events in Jesus' Life

BEGINNING OF JESUS' MINISTRY (C. 27 OR 29 CE)

Jesus is baptized by John at the Jordan River (1:9–11).
Jesus begins preaching in Galilee (1:14–15).
Jesus recruits Peter, Andrew, James, and John to be his first disciples (1:16–20).
Jesus performs miraculous cures and exorcisms in Capernaum and throughout Galilee (1:21–3:12).
Jesus appoints twelve chief disciples from among his many followers; he explains the meaning of parables to this inner circle (3:13–4:34).
Jesus returns to Nazareth, where his neighbors reject him (6:1–6).
Herod Antipas beheads John the Baptist (6:14–29).
Jesus miraculously feeds a Jewish crowd of 5,000 (6:30–44).

END OF JESUS' MINISTRY (C. 30 OR 33 CE)

Jesus leaves Galilee and travels through non-Jewish territories in Phoenicia and the Decapolis (7:24–37).
Jesus miraculously feeds a second crowd, this time of Gentiles (8:1–10, 14–21).
Jesus cures a blind man, and near the town of Caesarea Philippi, Peter's eyes are opened to Jesus' true identity as the Messiah; Jesus rebukes Peter for failing to understand that the Messiah must suffer and die (8:22–9:1).
Jesus is gloriously transfigured before Peter, James, and John (9:1–13).
Jesus travels south to Judea, teaching the crowds and debating with Pharisees (10:1–33).
On the road to Jerusalem, Jesus for the third time predicts his imminent suffering and death (the Passion predictions) (8:31–33; 9:30–32; 10:32–34).

EVENTS OF THE LAST WEEK OF JESUS' LIFE

On Palm Sunday, Jesus arranges his public entry into Jerusalem; his followers hail him in terms of the Davidic kingdom (11:1–11).
Jesus drives the moneychangers out of the Temple (11:15–19).
Seated on the Mount of Olives opposite Jerusalem, Jesus predicts the imminent destruction of the Temple (13:1–37).
Jesus' enemies conspire to kill him; Judas betrays Jesus (14:1–11).
Jesus holds a final Passover meal with the Twelve (14:12–31).
After the Last Supper, Jesus is arrested at Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives outside Jerusalem (14:32–52).
Jesus is tried on charges of blasphemy before the High Priest Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin (14:53–65).
On Good Friday, Jewish leaders accuse Jesus before Pontius Pilate; Jesus is declared guilty of treason, flogged, and condemned to crucifixion (15:1–20).
A group of Galilean women witness the Crucifixion; Joseph of Arimathaea provides a tomb for Jesus (15:40–47).
On Easter Sunday, Mary of Magdala and other women discover that Jesus' tomb is empty; a young man instructs them to look for Jesus in Galilee, but the women are too frightened to tell anyone of their experience (16:1–8).

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defeat, sacrifices his life "as a ransom for many" (10:45). Thus, the author balances older Christian traditions of his hero's phenomenal deeds with a bleak picture of Jesus' sufferings, devoting the last six chapters to a detailed account of the Passion. Although Matthew and Luke follow Mark in his north–south, power–weakness dichotomy, John's Gospel shows that there were other ways to arrange events in Jesus' story. In John, Jesus repeatedly travels back and forth between Galilee and Judea, performing miracles in both regions. As Papias's remark about the Gospel's lack of historical order warned, the Markan sequence of events, with its emphasis on a single, final visit to Jerusalem, appears to express the writer's theological vision of Jesus' life rather than a literal reconstruction of his subject's actual movements (see Box 7.3).

Mark's Gospel can be divided into six parts:

1. Prelude to Jesus' public ministry (1:1–13)
2. The Galilean ministry (1:14–8:26)
3. The journey to Jerusalem (8:27–10:52)
4. The Jerusalem ministry (11:1–15:47)
5. Mark's Passion narrative: Jesus' trial and cruifixion
6. Postlude: the empty tomb (16:1–8)

Prelude to Jesus' Public Ministry

Like the writer of a classical epic, Mark plunges into the middle of the action, providing no background about his hero but introducing him with apocalyptic suddenness. The opening line, "Here begins the gospel [good news] of Jesus Christ" (1:1), simultaneously announces his epic theme and echoes Genesis 1, alerting readers to see that, in Jesus, God has begun a new creative activity. Jesus is the **Christ** (Greek translation of the Hebrew *mashiah*) and "the Son of God," titles that Mark seldom uses in his narrative, for one of his purposes is to demonstrate that in his lifetime the majority of people did not recognize Jesus' divine Sonship. No person calls Jesus "a son of God" until almost the very end of Mark's Gospel (see Box 7.4). Significantly, at that point Jesus is already dead, and the speaker is neither a Jew nor a disciple but a Roman centurion (15:39).

By citing, as if from memory, a blend of passages from Isaiah (40:3) and Malachi (3:1)—that a divinely appointed "herald" and a "voice crying aloud in the wilderness" are preparing a path for the Lord—Mark immediately places Jesus' story in the context of the Hebrew Bible. Mark identifies the "herald" with **John the Baptist,** a desert ascetic then conducting a religious campaign at the Jordan River, where John baptizes converts "in token of repentance, for the forgiveness of sins" (1:4). Jesus, implicitly included among the repentant, appears for **baptism,** perhaps as John's disciple. Mark has John predict a "mightier" successor, although he does not show the Baptist as explicitly identifying Jesus as such.

The biographer's decision to introduce Jesus at the Jordan River is significant, for the Jordan was the gateway by which the Israelite tribes originally entered Palestine, their Promised Land. Mark may also have expected his readers to remember that "Jesus" is the Greek version of "Joshua," the name of Moses' successor who led Israel across Jordan into its homeland. Mark's brief reference to Jesus' being tested for forty days in the Judean wilderness also has biblical connotations. As the Israelites wandered for forty years through the Sinai wilderness, undergoing trials and temptations, so Jesus is tempted by **Satan** in the desert, the untamed haunt of hostile entities. Jesus vanquishes Satan, just as Joshua conquered the Canaanite nations that opposed Israel (Josh. 1–6).

Mark's allusion to Jesus' overcoming the Evil One introduces another of the author's principal themes: God's Son will break the devil's hold on humanity. Jesus' **exorcisms**—the casting out of demons who have possessed human beings—are an important part of Jesus' ministry and are given proportionately greater space in Mark than in any other Gospel. (In contrast, John's Gospel does not contain a single reference to Jesus' performing exorcisms.)

The Galilean Ministry: Inaugurating the Kingdom

Mark's Eschatological Urgency

Mark launches Jesus' career with a startlingly eschatological message: "The time has come, the kingdom of God is upon you; repent and believe the Gospel" (1:15). Mark's sense of eschatological urgency permeates his entire Gospel, profoundly affecting his portrayal of Jesus' life and teaching. With the tradition that Jesus had prophesied the Temple's fall about to be realized, Mark, writing about 70 CE, sees the

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BOX 7.4 Mark's Identification of Jesus as "Son of God"

Although Mark's preferred designation of Jesus is "Son of Man," he also identifies Jesus as **"Son of God"** at strategic places in his narrative. In most editions of Mark, the first reference to Jesus' divine parentage occurs in the opening verse and is addressed directly to readers, who must be aware of Jesus' supernatural identity if Mark's way of telling his hero's story—an ironic contrast between who Jesus really is and who people mistake him for—is to succeed. Because some early manuscripts omit the phrase "Son of God" in Mark 1:1, however, it is possible that the author originally intended for readers to learn of Jesus' special relationship to the Father in the same manner that Jesus did, at his baptism, when a heavenly voice privately confides, "You are my beloved Son; in you I take delight" (Mark 1:11).

The "voice from heaven" paraphrases Psalm 2, a poem sung at the coronation of Israel's monarchs, a royal ceremony at which Yahweh is represented as adopting the newly consecrated king: "You are my son, . . . this day I become your father" (Ps. 2:7). Because Mark contains no reference to Jesus' virginal conception, many scholars think that the author regards Jesus as becoming God's son by adoption, his baptism and visitation by the Holy Spirit the equivalent of Davidic kings' being anointed with holy oil.

In an ironic counterpoint to God's voice, Mark next uses the speech of a demon to reveal Jesus' hidden identity. When driven from a man he has possessed, the demon angrily declares: "I know who you are—the Holy One of God" (1:25). Whereas Mark's human characters fail to recognize Jesus' true nature until after his death, supernatural entities, including "unclean spirits," know and fear him. In a typically Markan paradox, human opponents accuse Jesus of being an agent of Beelzebub, "the prince of demons"—allegedly the source of his supernatural power—while the demons themselves testify that Jesus is "the Son of God" (3:11, 22–28). Mark draws further on the questionable testimony of evil spirits when describing the Gerasene demoniac: The satanic "Legion" boldly announces that Jesus is "son of the Most High God" (5:1–13).

In contrast, when Peter finally perceives that Jesus is "the Christ," he apparently does not also intuit Jesus' divinity, confining his witness to his leader's messianic (political) role. In Mark's narrative, Jesus' closest disciples lack the perceptiveness of Beelzebub's imps! (Compare Mark's account of Peter's "confession" with Matthew's version, where the author has Peter employ a major Christological title, "Son of the living God," absent in Mark [Matt. 16:13–16].) Even after Jesus is miraculously transfigured before their eyes and the celestial voice again affirms that he is God's son (9:8), the Galilean disciples remain oblivious.

At Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin, Mark presents a darkly paradoxical glimpse of his hero's real identity. When the High Priest asks if his prisoner is indeed the "Son of the Blessed One" (a pious circumlocution for God), Jesus, for the first time in Mark's account, admits that he is—a confession of divinity that condemns him to death. Only when Jesus hangs lifeless on the cross does a human figure—a Roman centurion—belatedly speak of Jesus as "a son of God," a Hellenistic Gentile's recognition that Jesus had died a heroic death worthy of divine honor (see also Box 11.2).

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eschaton—the end of history as we know it—about to take place (13:1–4, 7–8, 14–20, 24–27, 30, 35–37). He therefore paints Jesus as an eschatological figure whose words are reinterpreted as specific warnings to Mark's generation. In the thought world Mark creates, the apocalyptic Son of Man who is about to appear in glory (13:24–31) is the same as the Son of Man who came forty years earlier to die on the cross (8:31, 38; 9:9–13, 31). The splendor of the one to come casts its radiance over Mark's portrait of the human Jesus (9:1–9).

Mark's style conveys his urgency: He uses the present tense throughout his Gospel and repeatedly connects the brief episodes (pericopes) of his narrative with the transition word *immediately*. Jesus scarcely finishes conducting a healing or exorcism in one Galilean village before he "immediately" rushes off to the next town to perform another miracle. In Mark's breathless presentation, the world faces an unprecedented crisis. Jesus' activity proclaims that history has reached its climactic moment. Hence, Mark measures time in mere days (during the Galilean ministry) and hours (during the Jerusalem episodes). Reduced to tiny increments, time is literally running out.

Mark represents Jesus as promising his original hearers that they will experience the *eschaton*—"the present generation will live to see it all" (13:30). The kingdom, God's active rule, is so close that some of Jesus' contemporaries "will not taste death before they have seen the kingdom of God already come in power" (9:1). The long-awaited figure of Elijah, the ancient prophet whose reappearance is to be an infallible sign of the last days (Mal. 4:5), has already materialized in the person of John the Baptist (9:12–13). Such passages indicate that Mark's community anticipated the imminent consummation of all things.

Mark as Apocalypse

So pervasive is Mark's eschatology that some scholars regard the entire Gospel as a modified **apocalypse** (*apokalypsis*), a literary work that reveals unseen realities and discloses events destined soon to climax in God's final intervention in human affairs. Mark's use of apocalyptic devices is particularly evident at the beginning and ending of his Gospel. God speaks directly as a disembodied voice (a phenomenon Hellenistic Jews called the *bath qol*) at Jesus' baptism and again at the **Transfiguration,** an **epiphany** (manifestation of divine presence) in which the disciples see Jesus transformed into a luminous being seated beside the ancient figures of Moses and Elijah (1:11; 9:2–9). In this apocalyptic scene, Jesus converses with Moses and Elijah (who represent, respectively, the Torah and the prophets) to demonstrate his continuity with Israel's biblical tradition. Jesus thus embodies God's ultimate revelation to humanity. Mark's declaration that at Jesus' baptism the heavens are "torn apart," suddenly giving access to the spirit realm, anticipates a later apocalyptic vision in the Book of Revelation. Revelation's author similarly describes "a door opened in heaven" and hears a voice inviting him to "come up here" and receive a preview of future history (Rev. 4:1–2).

At the most important event in his Gospel, Jesus' crucifixion, Mark repeats his image of the heavens being "torn" asunder. He states that at the instant of Jesus' death "the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom," a phenomenon that inspires a Gentile soldier to recognize Jesus' divinity (15:37–39). In describing this incident, Mark apparently assumes that his readers will understand the symbolism of the Temple curtain. According to Josephus, the outer room of the Temple was separated from the innermost sanctuary—the Holy of Holies where God's "glory" was believed to dwell invisibly—by a huge curtain that was embroidered with astronomical designs, images of the visible heavens that hid God's celestial throne from mortal eyes. In Mark's view, Jesus' redemptive death "tore apart" the curtain, opening the way to a heavenly reality that the earthly Temple had symbolized. For Mark, this rending of the sacred veil functions as an apocalypse or revelation of Jesus' supreme significance.

Jesus as Son of Man The author presents virtually all the events during Jesus' final hours as revelatory of God's unfolding purpose. At the Last Supper, Jesus emphasizes that the eschatological "Son of Man is going the way appointed for him" and that he will "never again" drink wine with his disciples until he will "drink it new in the kingdom of God" (14:21, 25). At his trial before the **Sanhedrin,** the Jewish leaders' highest judicial council, Jesus reveals his true identity for the first time: He confesses that he

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BOX 7.5 The Synoptic Gospels' Use of the Term "Son of Man"

The authors of the Synoptic Gospels use the expression "Son of Man" in three distinct ways, all of which they place on the lips of Jesus to denote three important aspects of his ministry. The three categories identify Jesus as the Son of Man who serves on earth, the Son of Man who must suffer and die, and the Son of Man who will be revealed in eschatological judgment. Representative examples of these three categories appear below.

THE EARTHLY SON OF MAN

Mark 2:10 (Matt. 9:6; Luke 5:24): Has authority to forgive sins.
Mark 2:27 (Matt. 12:8; Luke 6:5): Is Lord of the Sabbath.
Matthew 11:19 (Luke 7:34): Comes eating and drinking.
Matthew 8:20 (Luke 9:58): Has nowhere to lie his head.
Luke 19:20: Came to seek and save the lost.

THE SUFFERING SON OF MAN

Mark 8:31 (Luke 9:22): Must suffer.
Mark 9:12 (Matt. 17:12): Will suffer.
Mark 10:45 (Matt. 20:28): Came to serve and give his life.
Matthew 12:40 (Luke 11:30): Will be three days in the earth.

THE ESCHATOLOGICAL SON OF MAN

Mark 8:38 (Matt. 16:27; Luke 9:26): Comes in glory of the Father and holy angels.
Mark 14:26 (Matt. 24:30; Luke 21:27): Will be seen coming with clouds and glory.
Mark 14:62 (Matt. 26:64; Luke 22:69): Will be seen sitting at the right hand of power.
Luke 17:26 (Matt. 24:27): As it was in days of Noah, so in days of Son of Man.

For a fuller discussion of the Son of Man concept and its use by the Synoptic authors, see George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1974), pp. 145–158.

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is the Messiah and that the officiating High Priest "will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of God and coming with the clouds of heaven" (14:62–63).

This disclosure—found only in Mark—associates Jesus' suffering and death with his ultimate revelation as the eschatological Son of Man. A designation that appears almost exclusively in the Gospels and then always on the lips of Jesus, **Son of Man** is Mark's favored expression to denote Jesus' three essential roles: an earthly figure who teaches with authority, a servant who embraces suffering, and a future eschatological judge (see Box 7.5). Although many scholars question whether the historical Jesus ever used this title, many others regard it as Jesus' preferred means of self-identification. Still other scholars postulate that Jesus may have used the title Son of Man to designate another, future-coming figure who would vindicate Jesus' own ministry and that the later church, because of its faith in Jesus' resurrection, retrojected that title back into the account of Jesus' life at points where it originally did not appear. In Mark's view, however, Jesus himself is clearly the eschatological Son of Man.

Son of Man in Hellenistic-Jewish Literature The Hebrew Bible offers few clues to what Jesus may have meant if he employed this title. The phrase appears frequently in the Book of Ezekiel, where "son of man" is typically synonymous with "mortal" or "human being," commonly the prophet himself. In the Book of Daniel, however, "one like a [son of] man" appears as a celestial figure who receives divine authority (Dan. 7:14). Most scholars think that this human figure (contrasting with the mystic

"beasts" in Daniel's vision) originally symbolized a collective entity, Israel's faithful. By Jesus' time, Daniel's Son of Man apparently had assumed another identity, that of a supernatural individual who will come to judge the world.

The composite Book of 1 Enoch, which belongs to noncanonical Hellenistic-Jewish writings known as the Pseudepigrapha, contains a long section (called the Similitudes or Parables) that prominently features the Son of Man as the one who, at the consummation of history, passes judgment on humanity (1 Enoch 37–71). Although some scholars dispute this claim, many believe that this section of 1 Enoch was written by the first century CE. Fragments of Enoch (but not yet the Similitudes) have been found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the canonical Epistle of Jude cites Enoch as if it were Scripture (Jude 14–15). It seems likely that ideas about Enoch's Son of Man were current in Jesus' day and that he—or his immediate followers—applied them to his role in history.

The major element that Mark's Jesus adds to the Son of Man concept is that he is a servant who must suffer and die before attaining the kind of heavenly glory that Daniel 7 and 1 Enoch ascribe to him (cf. Mark 8:30–31; 10:45; 13:26–27; 14:62).

"The Son of Man Has the Right on Earth . . ." It is as the earthly Son of Man that Mark's Jesus claims the right to wield immense religious power (see Box 7.5). As Son of Man, the Markan Jesus assumes the authority to prescribe revolutionary changes in Jewish Law and custom (2:10). Behaving as if he already reigns as cosmic judge, Jesus forgives a paralytic's sins (2:1–12) and permits certain kinds of work on the Sabbath (3:1–5). In both instances, Jesus' pronouncements outrage Jewish leaders. Who but God can forgive sins? And who has the audacity to change Moses' inspired command to forbid all labor on God's day of rest (cf. Exod. 20:8–10; Deut. 5:12–15)?

In the eyes of Jews scrupulously observing Torah regulations, Jesus dishonors the **Sabbath** by healing a man's withered arm on that holy day. The Pharisees interpreted the Torah to permit saving a life or dealing with other comparable emergencies on the Sabbath, but in this case (2:23–28), Jesus seems to have violated the Torah for no compelling reason.

As Mark describes the situation, it is Jesus' flexible attitude toward Sabbath keeping that incites some Pharisees and supporters of Herod Antipas to hatch a murder plot against him (3:5–6). To most readers, Jesus' opponents overreact inexplicably. To many law-abiding Jews, however, Jesus' Sabbath-breaking miracles and declaration that the Sabbath was created for humanity's benefit (2:27–28) seem to strike at the heart of Jewish faith. Many devout Jews believed that the Torah was infallible and eternal. According to the Book of Jubilees, the Torah existed before God created the universe, and people *were* made to keep the Sabbath. Jesus' assertion that the Sabbath law is not absolute but relative to human needs appears to deny the Torah's unchanging validity and to question its status as God's final and complete revelation.

Teaching the Mysteries of the Kingdom

Jesus' Parables Many of Israel's prophets, and virtually all its apocalyptic writers, use highly symbolic language to convey their visions of the divine will. In depicting Jesus as the eschatological Son of Man, it is not surprising that Mark states categorically that Jesus never taught publicly without using parables (or other figures of speech) (4:34). The root meaning of the word **parable** is "a comparison," the discernment of similarities between one thing and another. Jesus' simplest parables are typically **similes,** comparisons using *as* or *like* to express unexpected resemblances between ostensibly unrelated objects, actions, or ideas. Thus, Jesus compares God's kingdom—which he never explicitly defines—to a number of items, including a mustard seed. Like the tiny seed, God's rule begins in an extremely small way, but eventually, like the mustard plant, it grows to an unexpectedly large size (4:30–32).

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(Jesus' intent in this parable may have been ironic, for farmers do not want wild mustard plants taking over their fields any more than most people wanted the kind of divine rule that Jesus promoted.) Like the parable of the growing seed (4:26–29), which appears in Mark alone, the mustard plant analogy stresses the unnoticed evolution of divine sovereignty rather than explaining its nature or form. Most parables are open-ended: They do not provide a fixed conclusion but invite the hearer to speculate about many possibilities inherent in the comparison. According to Mark, understanding parables involving germination and growth suggests the "secret" of God's kingdom, a glimpse into the mysterious principles by which God rules.

Other parables take the form of brief stories that exploit familiar situations or customs to illustrate a previously unrecognized truth. In the parable of the sower, a farmer plants seeds on different kinds of ground with distinctly different results (4:2–9). The lengthy interpretation that Mark attaches to the image of sowing seeds (4:13–20) transforms what was originally a simple parable into an allegory. An **allegory** is a complex literary form in which each element of the narrative—persons, places, actions, even objects—has a symbolic value. Because every item in the allegory functions as a symbol of something else, the allegory's meaning can be puzzled out only by identifying what each individual component in the story represents.

Almost all scholars believe that Mark's elaborate allegorical interpretations, equating different kinds of soil with the different responses people make when they receive the "seed" (gospel message), do not represent Jesus' original meaning. By the time Mark incorporated the sower pericope into his Gospel, the Christian community had already used it to explain people's contrasting reactions to their preaching. Jesus' pithy tale based on everyday agricultural practices was reinterpreted to fit the later experience of Christian missionaries. The reference to "persecution" (4:17) places the allegorical factor in Mark's time rather than in the context of Jesus' personal experience in Galilee.

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In one of his most controversial passages, Mark states that Jesus uses parables to *prevent* the public from understanding his message (4:11–12). To many readers, it seems incredible that Jesus deliberately teaches in a way intended to confuse or alienate his audience. Mark justifies his hero's alleged practice by quoting from Isaiah (6:9–10), which pictures Yahweh telling the prophet that his preaching will be useless because Yahweh has already made it impossible for the Israelites to comprehend Isaiah's meaning. Mark's attempt to explain why most people did not follow Jesus seems contrary to the gracious goodwill that the Gospel writers normally associate with him and probably does not express the policy of the historical Jesus. In the historical experience of Mark's community, however, it appears that the kingdom's secrets were reserved for a few chosen disciples, such as those whom Mark says privately received Jesus' esoteric teaching (4:11). (In Luke's edition of Mark, he removes Isaiah's pessimistic declaration from Jesus' lips and transfers the saying to his sequel, the Book of Acts, where he places it in Paul's mouth to explain why the apostle gave up trying to convert fellow Jews and concentrated instead on the more receptive Gentiles; cf. Mark 4:11–12; Luke 8:10; Acts 28:25–28.)

Jesus and the Demons Eschatological beliefs are concerned not only with the end of the world but also with visions of invisible spirit beings, both good and evil (see Chapter 19). Apocalyptic literature, such as Daniel and 1 Enoch, typically presents God's defeat of spiritual evil as the ultimate victory that completes God's sovereignty over the entire universe. Given Mark's strongly eschatological point of view, it is not surprising that he makes a battle between supernatural forces—God's Son versus Satan's demons—an integral part of his apocalyptic Gospel. After noting Jesus' resistance to Satan (1:12–13), Mark reinforces the theme of cosmic struggle by making Jesus' first miracle an exorcism. Remarkably, the demon that Jesus expels from a human victim is the first character in the

Markan narrative to recognize Jesus as "the Holy One of God"—who has come "to destroy" the agents of evil (1:23–26).

Following his exorcisms at **Capernaum,** Jesus performs similar feats in Gentile territory, "the country of the Gerasenes." Driving a whole army of devils from a Gerasene madman, Jesus casts them into a herd of pigs. The religiously unclean animals become a fit home for spirits who drive people to commit unclean acts (5:1–20). The demons' name—"legion"—is an unflattering reference to the Roman legions (large military units) then occupying Palestine (and in Mark's day assaulting Jerusalem). When in Capernaum, a Galilean Jewish city, Jesus commands the demons to remain silent, whereas in the Gerasene region, he orders the dispossessed Gentile to tell others about his cure.

Mark arranges his material to show that Jesus does not choose to battle evil in isolation. At the outset of his campaign through Galilee, Jesus gathers followers who will form the nucleus of a new society, one presumably free from demonic influence. Recruiting a band of Galilean fishermen and peasants, Jesus selects two sets of brothers, **Simon Peter** (also called **Cephas**) and **Andrew,** and James and John—sons of **Zebedee** also known as **"sons of thunder (Boanerges)"**—to form his inner circle (1:16–20). Later, he adds another eight disciples to complete the Twelve, a number probably representing the twelve tribes of Israel: **Philip; Bartholomew; Matthew; Thomas; James,** son of Alphaeus; **Thaddeus;** Simon the Canaanite; and **Judas Iscariot** (3:16–19; cf. the different list in Acts 1). Mark states that, when Jesus commissions the Twelve to perform exorcisms (6:7–13), they fail miserably (9:14–18, 28–29), a sad contrast to the success enjoyed by some exorcists who are *not* Jesus' followers (9:38–41).

Jesus Accused of Sorcery In another incident involving demonic possession (3:22–30), Mark dramatizes a head-on collision between Jesus as God's agent for overthrowing evil and persons who see Jesus as a tool of the devil. The clash occurs when "doctors of the law" (teachers and interpreters of the Torah) from Jerusalem accuse Jesus of using black magic to perform exorcisms. Denying that evil can produce good, Jesus countercharges that persons who attribute good works to Satan "slander the Holy Spirit," the divine force manifested in Jesus' actions.

Matthew's version of the incident explicitly links Jesus' defeat of evil spirits with the arrival of the **kingdom of God.** The Matthean Jesus declares, "If it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out the devils, then be sure the kingdom of God has already come upon you" (Matt. 12:28). To both Evangelists, Jesus' successful attack on demonic control is a revelation that through his presence God now rules. Willful refusal to accept Jesus' healings as evidence of divine power is to resist the Spirit, an obstinacy that prevents spiritual insight.

The Existence of Demons Mark, like other New Testament authors, reflects a common Hellenistic belief in the existence of unseen entities that influence human lives. Numerous Hellenistic documents record charms to ward off demons or free one from their control. In Judaism, works like the deuterocanonical Book of Tobit reveal a belief that demons could be driven out by the correct use of magical formulas (Tob. 6:1–8; 8:1–3). Josephus, who was Mark's contemporary, relates a story about Eleazar, who allegedly exorcised a demon in the presence of the emperor Vespasian (69–79 CE), drawing the malign spirit out through its victim's nose (*Antiquities* 8.46–49).

Zoroastrianism A belief in devils and demonic possession appears in Jewish literature primarily after the period of Persian domination (539–330 BCE), when Persian religious ideas seem to have influenced Jewish thought. According to the Persian religion **Zoroastrianism,** the whole universe, visible and invisible, is divided into two contending powers of light and darkness, good and evil. Only after historical contact with Zoroastrian dualism does the figure of Satan

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emerge as humanity's adversary in biblical literature (Job 1–2; Zech. 3). Angels and demons thereafter populate Hellenistic-Jewish writings, such as the books of Daniel and 1 Enoch.

Belief in Supernatural Evil Although Hellenistic Greek and Judeo-Christian writers may express their beliefs about supernatural evil in terms considered naive or irrational to today's scientifically disciplined mind, they reflect a viewpoint with important implications for contemporary society. Surrounded by threats of terrorism, lethal diseases such as cancer and AIDS, and frightening disregard for human life, people may wonder if the forces of cruelty and violence are not greater than the sum of their human agents. Does evil exist as a power independent of human volition? Such diverse works as the Synoptic Gospels, Ephesians (6:10–17), and Revelation show a keen awareness of evil so pervasive and so profound that it cannot be explained solely in terms of human acts, individual or collective. Whatever philosophical view we choose to interpret the human predicament, the Gospel portrayal of Jesus' struggle to impart wholeness and health to others expresses the Evangelists' conviction that humanity cannot save itself without divine aid.

Jesus the Healer Physical cures, as well as exorcisms, characterize Jesus' assault on evil. In Mark's portrayal, one of Jesus' most important functions is to bring relief to the afflicted (see Figure 7.3). He drives a fever from Simon Peter's mother-in-law (1:29–31), cleanses a leper (1:40–42), enables a paralyzed man to walk (2:1–12), restores a man's withered hand (3:1–6), stops a woman's chronic hemorrhaging (5:25–34), and

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FIGURE 7.3 *Christ with the Sick Around Him, Receiving Little Children.* In this etching by Rembrandt (1606–1669), healing light radiates from the central figure of Jesus and creates a protective circle of illumination around those whom he cures.

resuscitates the comatose daughter of **Jairus,** a synagogue official (5:21–24, 35–43). To Mark, Jesus' restoration of physical health to suffering humanity is an indispensable component of divine rule, tangible confirmation that God's kingdom is about to dawn.

Mark's Narrative Techniques

In assembling from various oral sources a series of brief anecdotes about Jesus' ability to cure the sick, Mark stitches the miracle stories together like pearls on a string. Weaving these originally independent pericopes into the fabric of his narrative, Mark re-creates them with vividness and immediacy. Besides using a wealth of concrete detail to help readers visualize the scene or feel its emotional impact, Mark commonly employs the technique of *intercalation,* inserting one story inside another. This sandwiching device typically serves to make the story placed inside another narrative function as interpretative commentary on the framing story. In telling of Jesus' family's attempt to impede his ministry (3:21, 31–35), for example, Mark inserts a seemingly unrelated anecdote about Jesus' opponents accusing him of sorcery (3:22–30), implicitly associating his "mother and brothers" with his adversaries.

Mark uses the same device of wrapping one story around another when describing the resuscitation of Jairus's daughter, interrupting the Jairus episode to incorporate the anecdote about a hemorrhaging woman into the middle of the narrative. Pushing through the crowds surrounding him, Jesus is on his way to help Jairus's seriously ill daughter (5:22–24) when a woman—who Mark says had suffered for twelve years from unstoppable bleeding (and was therefore ritually unclean)—suddenly grabs his cloak and, as if by force of desperate need, draws into her ailing body Jesus' curative energy. This incident is doubly unique: It is the only Gospel healing to occur without Jesus' conscious will and the Evangelists' only hint about the physical nature of Jesus' ability to heal. Mark states that Jesus can *feel* his power flow out when the woman touches him, as if he were a dynamo being drained of electrical energy (5:25–34). The Markan Jesus, moreover, does not know at first who is tapping his power.

Mark then resumes the Jairus narrative: Although a messenger reports that the girl has already died, Jesus insists that she is only "asleep." Taking his three closest disciples into the girl's room, he commands her to "get up"—"*Talitha cum,*" an Aramaic phrase that Mark's community probably revered for its association with Jesus' power over death (5:35–43). The author links the two stories by a simple numerical device—the mature woman had been afflicted for a dozen years and the young girl is twelve years old—and by the assertion that it is the participants' *faith* that cures them. The woman demonstrates unconditional trust in Jesus' power, and Jairus presumably accepts Jesus' advice to replace fear for his daughter's safety with "faith."

Mark's Ironic Vision In the Nazareth episode, where Jesus appears as a prophet without honor (6:4–6), Mark invites his readers to share Jesus' astonishment that people who should have known better reject a golden opportunity to benefit from Jesus' help. As Mark presents Jesus' story—which is largely a tale of humanity's self-defeating rejection of God's attempt to redeem it—such disparities abound. Demons steeped in evil instantly recognize who Jesus is, but most *people*—including his peasant neighbors and the educated religious elite—do not. The wind and waves obey him during a storm on the **Sea of Galilee** (4:35–41) (see Figures 7.4 and 7.5), but his disciples ultimately prove disloyal. He miraculously feeds hungry multitudes (an incident Mark records in two different versions [6:30–44; 8:1–10]) and can suspend the laws of physics by striding across Galilee's waters (6:30–52; 8:1–10), but Jesus' closest followers are unable to grasp the meaning of his control over nature. Among the very few who respond positively to him, the majority are social outcasts or nobodies such as lepers, blind

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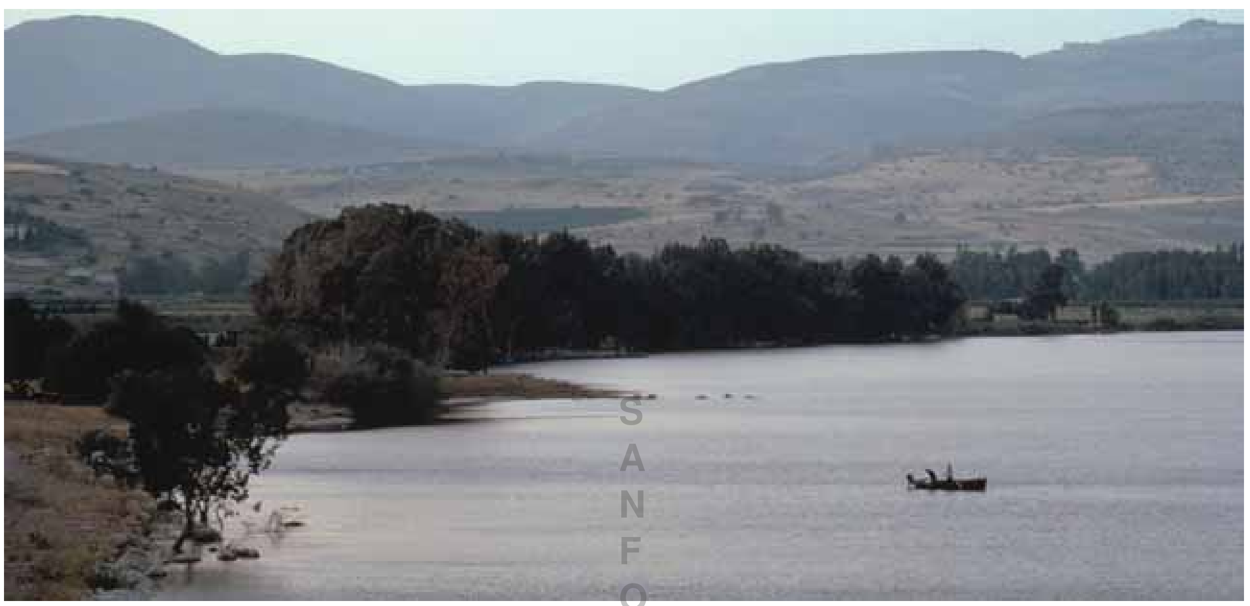

FIGURE 7.4 Fishing boat returning to Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee. The village of Capernaum, home to Peter and his brother Andrew, served as a center for Jesus' early Galilean ministry.

FIGURE 7.5 Excavations at Capernaum. Dated to the first century CE, the ruins of these small private houses are located near the shore of the Sea of Galilee, an appropriate location for the dwellings of fishermen. Archaeologists have found considerable evidence indicating that one of these humble structures belonged to Peter. According to Mark, Jesus cured Peter's mother-in-law of a fever there (Mark 1:29–31; cf. 2:1–12).

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mendicants, ritually unclean women, and the diseased. This *irony*, or logical incongruity between normal expectation and what actually happens in the narrative, determines both Mark's structuring of his Gospel and his characterization of Jesus' messiahship.

The Journey to Jerusalem: Jesus' Predestined Suffering

Mark's Central Irony: Jesus' Hidden Messiahship

In chapter 8, which forms the central pivot on which the entire Gospel turns, Mark ties together several motifs that convey his essential vision of Jesus' ministry. Besides repeating the theme of the disciples' obtuseness, chapter 8 also sounds Mark's concurrent themes of the hidden or unexpected quality of Jesus' messiahship—especially the necessity of his suffering—and the requirement that all believers be prepared to embrace a comparably painful fate. In contrast to John's Gospel, in which Jesus' identity is publicly affirmed at the outset of his career, Mark has no one even hint that Jesus is Israel's Messiah until almost the close of the Galilean campaign, when Peter—in a flash of insight—recognizes him as such (8:29). The Markan Jesus then swears the disciples to secrecy, as he had earlier ordered other witnesses of his deeds to keep silent (1:23–24, 34; 3:11–12; 5:7; 7:36; 8:30; see also 9:9). Jesus' reluctance to have news of his

miracles spread abroad is known as the **messianic secret,** a term coined by the German scholar William Wrede (1901).

Some commentators have suggested that Mark's picture of Jesus' forbidding others to discuss him merely reflects historical fact: that during Jesus' lifetime most of his contemporaries did not regard him as God's special agent and that he himself made no public claims to be Israel's Messiah. Most scholars, however, believe that Mark's theme of the messianic secret represents the author's theological purpose. For Mark, people could not know Jesus' identity until *after* he had completed his mission. Jesus had to be unappreciated in order to be rejected and killed—to fulfill God's will that he "give up his life as a ransom for many" (10:45).

A conviction that Jesus must suffer an unjust death—an atonement offering for others—to confirm and complete his messiahship is the heart of Mark's **Christology** (concepts about the nature and function of Christ). Hence, Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi that Jesus is the Christ (Messiah) is immediately followed by Jesus' first prediction that he will go to Jerusalem only to die (8:29–32). When Peter objects to this notion of a rejected and defeated Messiah, Jesus calls his chief disciple a "Satan." Derived from a Hebrew term meaning "obstacle," the epithet *Satan* labels Peter's attitude an obstacle or roadblock on Jesus' predestined path to the cross. Peter understands Jesus no better than outsiders, regarding the Messiah as a God-empowered hero who conquers his enemies, not as a submissive victim of their brutality. For Mark, however, Jesus' true identity must remain shrouded in darkness until it is revealed in the painful glare of the cross (see Figure 7.6).

At the end of chapter 8, Mark introduces a third idea: True disciples must expect to suffer as Jesus does. In two of the three Passion predictions, Jesus emphasizes that "anyone who wishes to be a follower of mine must leave self behind; he must take up his cross, and come with me" (8:27–34; 10:32–45). Irony permeates the third instance when James and John, sons of Zebedee, presumptuously ask to rule with

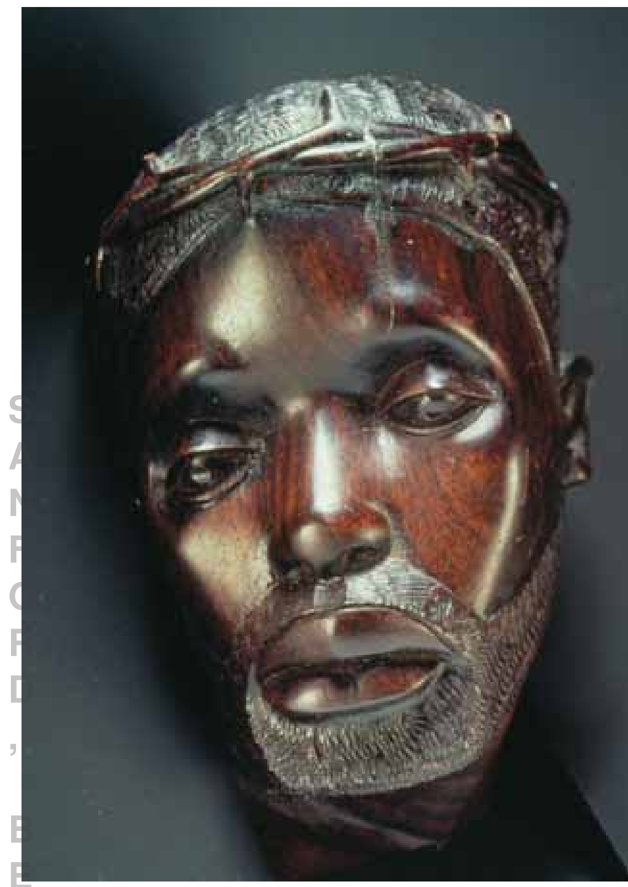

FIGURE 7.6 *Christ with the Crown of Thorns.* In this wooden carving of Jesus crowned with thorns, an anonymous twentieth-century African sculptor beautifully captures both the sorrow and the mystery of Mark's suffering Son of Man.

Jesus, occupying places of honor on his right and left. As Jesus explains that reigning with him means imitating his sacrifice, Mark's readers are intended to remember that when Jesus reaches Jerusalem the positions on his right and left will be taken by the two brigands crucified next to him (15:27).

In reiterating the necessity of suffering, Mark addresses a problem that undoubtedly troubled members of his own community: how to explain the contrast between the high expectations of reigning with Christ in glory (10:35–37) and the believers' actual circumstances. Instead of being vindicated publicly as God's chosen faithful, Christians of the late 60s CE were being treated like outcasts or traitors by Jewish Zealots

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and like criminals by the Roman emperor. Mark offers fellow believers the consolation that their hardships are foreshadowed by Jesus' experience; Christians must expect to be treated no more justly than their Master.

Mark's device of having a delegation of Jewish leaders conspire against Jesus in Galilee (3:6) and having Jesus repeatedly prophesy his death serves to cast the shadow of the cross backward in time over the Galilean ministry. These foreshadowing techniques help unify the polar opposites of Mark's narrative: They not only connect the powerful healer of Galilee with the sacrificial victim in Jerusalem but also link Jesus' experience with that of Mark's implied readers.

The Jerusalem Ministry: A Week of Sacred Time

In the third section of his Gospel, Mark focuses exclusively on the last week of Jesus' life, from the Sunday on which Jesus enters Jerusalem to the following Sunday's dawn, when some Galilean women find his tomb empty (11:1–16:8). To Mark, this is a sacred period during which Jesus accomplishes his life's purpose, sacrificing himself for humanity's redemption. Mark's Christian Holy Week also corresponds to Passover week, when thousands of Jews from throughout the Greco-Roman world gather in Jerusalem to celebrate Israel's deliverance from slavery in Egypt. As he narrates Jesus' rejection by Jewish leaders and execution by Roman officials, Mark celebrates the irony of events: Blind to Jesus' value, no one recognizes Jesus as a deliverer greater than Moses and a sacrifice that epitomizes the essential meaning of Passover.

The Triumphal Entry

If Mark was aware of Jesus' other visits to Jerusalem (narrated in John's Gospel), he dismisses them as unimportant compared with his last. In bold strokes, the author contrasts Jesus' joyous reception in the holy city with the tragedy of his crucifixion five days later. A crowd, probably of Galilean supporters, enthusiastically welcomes Jesus to Jerusalem, hailing him as restorer of "the coming kingdom of our father David" (11:9–10). As Mark reports it, Jesus had carefully arranged his entry to fulfill Zechariah's prophecy that the Messiah would appear in humble guise, riding on a beast of burden (Zech. 9:9). Mark thus portrays Jesus suddenly making a radical change in policy: Instead of hiding his messianic identity, Jesus now seems to "go public"—challenging Jerusalem to accept him as God's Anointed. Jesus' appearance as a messianic claimant also challenges Roman authority. Because the Messiah was commonly expected to reestablish David's monarchy, the Roman prefect Pontius Pilate was likely to interpret Jesus' actions as a political claim to Judean kingship and, hence, to Rome, an act of treason (15:2–3).

Focus on the Temple

Once Jesus is in Jerusalem, his activities center around the Temple: His entrance into the city is not complete until he enters the Temple courts (11:1–10). On the Monday following his arrival, he creates a riot in the sanctuary, overturning moneychangers' tables and disrupting the sale of sacrificial animals (11:15–19). This assault on the Sadducean administration brands him as a threat to public order and probably seals his fate with the chief priests and Temple police.

As Mark describes his actions, Jesus visits the Temple, not to worship, but to pronounce eschatological judgment: Jesus' last teaching is a prophecy of the sanctuary's imminent destruction (ch. 13)—a prediction that may lie behind later charges that Jesus conspired to destroy the center of Jewish religion (14:56). Jesus' negative verdict on the Temple begins to take effect at his death, when the jeweled curtain veiling its inner sanctum is split apart (15:38), exposing its interior to public gaze and foreshadowing its imminent desecration by Gentiles (see Figure 7.7).

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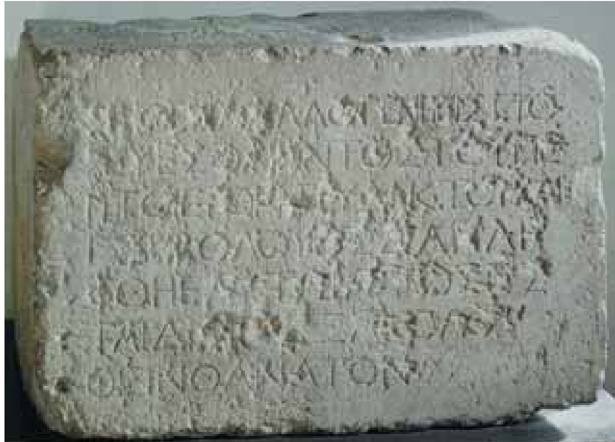

FIGURE 7.7 Warning inscription from Herod's Temple. Illustrating the barrier erected between Jews and Gentiles, this inscription warned Temple visitors that no Gentile could enter the inner courtyards except on pain of death.

Besides condemning the Temple's sacrificial system and the Sadducean priests who control it, Mark uses other devices to indicate that Jesus' Jerusalem ministry is fundamentally an adverse judgment on the city. Jesus' cursing an unproductive fig tree—the curse (11:12–14) and its fulfillment (11:20–24) bracketing the story of his attack on Temple practices—represents Mark's intent to condemn the Jerusalem leaders who, in his opinion, do not bear "good fruit" and are destined to wither and die.

The parable of the wicked tenants who kill their landlord's son (12:1–11) has the same function: to discredit Jesus' enemies. In Mark's view, the landlord (God) has now given his vineyard, traditionally a symbol for Israel, to "others"—the author's Christian community.

Confrontations at the Temple

In Jerusalem, clashes between Jesus and Jewish leaders intensify, becoming a matter of life or death. Mark pictures Jesus scoring success after success in a series of hostile encounters with representatives of leading religious parties as he moves through the Temple precincts, thronged with Passover pilgrims. The Pharisees and Herod Antipas's supporters attempt to trap Jesus on the controversial issue of paying taxes to Rome, a snare he eludes by suggesting that people return government coins to their source while reserving for God the rest of one's life.

The Sadducees also suffer defeat when they try to force Jesus into an untenable position they hope will illustrate the illogic of a belief in resurrection to future life. When asked to which husband a woman who has been widowed six times will be married when all the former spouses are raised, Jesus states that there will be no ethical problem because resurrected persons escape the limits of human sexuality and become "like the angels in heaven" (12:18–25). Citing the Torah, apparently the only part of the Hebrew Bible that the Sadducees accept, he quotes Yahweh's words to Moses at the burning bush—that Yahweh is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exod. 3:6)—arguing that, because Yahweh is "not God of the dead but of the living," the ancient patriarchs must still be alive from the Deity's perspective (12:26–27).

Interestingly, Mark closes Jesus' Temple debates with a friendly encounter in which the Galilean and a Torah expert agree on the essence of true religion. Answering a "lawyer's" question about the Bible's most important requirement, Jesus cites the Shema, or Jewish declaration of monotheism: There is only one God, and Israel must love him with all its force and being (Deut. 6:4–5). To this he adds a second Torah command: to love one's neighbor as oneself (Lev. 19:18). In agreement, the "lawyer" and Jesus exchange compliments. Although not a follower, the Jerusalem leader sees that active love is the essence of divine rule, a perception that Jesus says makes him "not far from the kingdom of God"—a more favorable verdict than Jesus ever passes on the Twelve (12:28–34).

Jesus' Prophecy of the Temple's Fall

In chapter 13, Mark underscores his eschatological concerns. In response to the disciples' question about when his prediction of Jerusalem's destruction will take place, Jesus delivers his longest speech, associating the Temple's fall

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with an era of catastrophes that culminate in the Son of Man appearing as eschatological judge. The author seems to have composed this discourse from a variety of sources, combining Jesus' words with older Jewish apocalyptic literature and perhaps with prophetic **oracles** from his own community as well. A considerably expanded version of the speech is preserved in Matthew 24, and a significantly modified version of Mark's eschatological expectations appears in Luke 21. John's Gospel contains no parallel to the Synoptic prophecies about the *eschaton*.

Readers will notice that Mark incorporates two somewhat contradictory views of the End. He states that a swarm of disasters and frightening astronomical phenomena will provide unmistakable "signs" that the Parousia is near, just as the budding fig tree heralds the arrival of spring (13:8, 14–20, 24–31). Conversely, neither the Son nor his followers can surmise the time of Final Judgment, so one must keep constant watch, because the End will occur without previous warning (13:32–37).

Oracles of Disaster Mark's strong emphasis on political and social upheavals as portents of the End reflects the turbulent era in which he composed his "wartime" Gospel. If, as historians believe, Mark wrote during the Jewish Revolt, when battles and insurrections were daily occurrences, he seems to have viewed these events as a turning point in history, an unprecedented crisis leading to the final apocalypse. In addition to witnessing the intense suffering of Palestinian Jews, the Markan community was undoubtedly aware of recent persecutions in Rome that resulted in numerous deaths, including the executions of Christianity's two chief apostles, Peter and Paul (mid-60s CE). Between about 67 and 70 CE, Zealots may also have attacked Palestinian Christians who accepted Gentiles into their communities, for those extreme revolutionaries regarded virtually all Gentiles as enemies of the Jewish nation. These ordeals may well account for Mark's references to "persecutions" and assertions that unless this period of testing was "cut short," no believers could survive (13:9–13).

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The "Abomination" Mark incorporates a cryptic passage from the Book of Daniel into his eschatological discourse. When believers see "'the abomination of desolation' usurping a place which is not his," they are to abandon their homes in Judea and take refuge in nearby hills (13:14–20; cf. Daniel 9:27; 11:31; 12:11). Directly addressing his readers, the author alerts them to the importance of understanding this reference (13:14). Some scholars believe that Mark here refers to the Zealots' violent occupation of the Temple in 67–68 CE and their pollution of its sacred precincts with the blood of their victims, which may have included some Christians (see Box 7.6).

This tribulation, which threatens the people of God, will be concluded by the Son of Man's appearing with his angels to gather the faithful. Mark shows Jesus warning disciples that all these horrors and wonders will occur in the lifetime of his hearers, although no one knows the precise day or hour (13:24–32). Mark's eschatological fervor, which Matthew and Luke subsequently mute in their respective versions of the Markan apocalypse (cf. Matt. 24–25 and Luke 21), vividly conveys both the fears and hopes of the author's Christian generation. Mark's eschatology, in fact, closely resembles that of Paul, who—a few years earlier—wrote the church in Corinth that "the time we live in will not last long" (1 Cor. 7:29). As his first letter to the Thessalonians makes clear, Paul fully expected to be alive at the Parousia (1 Thess. 4:13–18; see Chapters 14 and 15).

The Last Supper and Jesus' Betrayal

Following the eschatological discourse, Jesus withdraws with his disciples to a private "upper room" in Jerusalem. On Thursday evening, he presides over a **Passover** feast of unleavened bread, an observance that solemnly recalls Israel's last night in Egypt, when the Angel of Death "passed over" Israelites' houses to slay the Egyptian firstborn (Exod. 11:1–13:16). In a

BOX 7.6 The Desecrating "Abomination" and Mark's Eschatological Community

The longest speech that Mark assigns to Jesus is his prediction of Jerusalem's imminent destruction (Mark 13), suggesting that for Mark's intended audience this event was of great importance, a warning that the Parousia (Jesus' return in glory) was near. Mark's cryptic reference to the "abomination of desolation," an apocalyptic image borrowed from Daniel (Dan. 9:27; 11:31; 12:11), signifies a Gentile pollution of the Jerusalem Temple. Mark pointedly advises his readers to take careful note of this profanation of the sanctuary and, when they see it occurring, abandon their homes in Judea and take refuge in the surrounding hills.

In Daniel, the "abomination" was Antiochus IV's defilement of the Temple by sacrificing swine on its altar and erecting an altar to Zeus, king of the Hellenic gods, in its courtyard. Some scholars suggest that the "abomination" to which Mark refers was the occupation of the Temple area by brigands shortly before the Roman siege began.

According to Josephus, in the winter of 67–68 CE, a mixed band of Jewish guerrilla fighters moved into Jerusalem from the countryside and seized control of the Temple. Led by Eleazar, son of Simon (see Chapter 3), this revolutionary group formed the Zealot party, which resolved not only to expel the Romans but also to purge the city of any Jewish leaders who cooperated with them. Adopting a policy of radical egalitarianism, the Zealots fiercely attacked Jerusalem's wealthy aristocracy and the Temple's priestly administration, which they condemned as traitors to the Jewish nation for having collaborated with the Romans. The Zealots assassinated many of the Jewish landowners and priests, staining the Temple pavements with the blood of Jerusalem's leadership, acts that outraged Josephus and may have been regarded as a polluting "abomination" by other Jews.

The Zealots also held illegal trials for and executions of those they suspected of not sharing their total commitment to the war against Rome. It is possible that Jerusalem's Christian community, which by then included Gentiles (an anathema to the Zealots), suffered Zealot persecution and that the shedding of Christian blood, both Jewish and Gentile, also contaminated the holy place, an "abominable" guarantee of its impending fall.

The church historian Eusebius records that shortly before Jerusalem was obliterated Christians there received an "oracle" inciting them to escape from the city and settle in **Pella,** a mostly Gentile town in the Decapolis, a territory east of the Jordan dominated by a league of ten Hellenistic cities (*Eccl. Hist.* 3.5.3). Scholars still debate the historicity of this episode, but Josephus reveals that such "inspired" predictions about Jerusalem's dire fate were circulating among Jews during the war with Rome. He states that some Jews prophesied that the Temple would be destroyed "when sedition and native hands [the Zealots] should be the first to defile God's sacred precincts" (*The Jewish War* 4.6.3; see also 4.3.10 and 4.3.12). In Christian circles, oral traditions about Jesus' pronouncement on Jerusalem may have been the source of Mark's declaration to flee the city when the "abomination" (Zealot defilement of the sanctuary?) occurred.

For a detailed analysis of the Jewish Revolt's influence on Mark 13, see Joel Marcus, "The Jewish War and the *Sitz im Leben* of Mark," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 3(3) (1992): 441–462.

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ritual at the close of their meal, Jesus gives the Passover a new significance, stating that the bread he distributes is his "body" and the wine his "blood of the [New] Covenant, shed for many" (14:22–25)—liturgical symbols of his crucifixion. Mark's account of this **Last Supper,** the origin of the Christian celebration of the **Eucharist,** or Holy Communion, closely resembles Paul's earlier description of the ceremony (1 Cor. 11:23–26).

Mark's Passion Narrative: Jesus' Trial and Crucifixion

Mark's Suffering Messiah

In describing Jesus' **Passion**—his final suffering and death—Mark's narrative irony reaches its height. Although the author emphasizes many grim details of Jesus' excruciatingly painful execution, he means his readers to see the enormous disparity between the *appearance* of Jesus' vulnerability to the world's evil and the actual reality of his spiritual triumph. Jesus' enemies, who believe they are ridding Judea of a dangerous radical, are in fact making possible his saving death—all according to God's design.

Jesus' Arrest in Gethsemane Even so, Mark's hero is tested fully—treated with vicious cruelty (14:65; 15:15–20), deserted by all his friends (14:50), and even (in human eyes) abandoned by God (15:34). The agony begins in **Gethsemane,** a grove or vineyard on the **Mount of Olives** opposite Jerusalem, to which Jesus and the disciples retreat after the Last Supper. In the Gethsemane episode (14:28–52), Mark places a dual emphasis on Jesus' fulfilling predictions in the Hebrew Bible (14:26–31, 39) and on his personal anguish. By juxtaposing these two elements, Mark demonstrates that, while the Crucifixion will take place as God long ago planned (and revealed in Scripture), Jesus' part in the drama of salvation demands heroic effort. While the disciples sleep, Jesus faces the hard reality of his impending torture, experiencing "grief" and "horror and dismay." To Mark, his hero—emotionally ravaged and physically defenseless—provides the model for all believers whose loyalty is tested. Although Jesus prays that God will spare him the humiliation and pain he dreads, he forces his own will into harmony with God's. Mark reports that, even during this cruel testing of the heavenly Father–Son of Man relationship, Jesus addresses the Deity as ***Abba,*** an Aramaic term expressing a child's trusting intimacy with the parent (14:32–41).

Jesus' Hearing Before Caiaphas Mark's skill as a storyteller—and interpreter of the events he narrates—is demonstrated in the artful way he organizes his account of Jesus' Passion. Peter's testing (14:37–38) and denial that he even knows Jesus (15:65–72) provide the frame for and ironic parallel to Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish council headed by **Caiaphas,** the High Priest. When Peter fulfills Jesus' prediction about denying him, the disciple's failure serves a double purpose: confirming Jesus' prophetic gifts and strengthening readers' confidence in Jesus' ability to fulfill other prophecies, including those of his resurrection (14:28) and reappearance as the glorified Son of Man (14:62).

Mark contrasts Peter's fearful denial with Jesus' courageous declaration to the Sanhedrin that he is indeed the Messiah and the appointed agent of God's future judgment (14:62). The only Gospel writer to show Jesus explicitly accepting a messianic identity at his trial, Mark may do so to highlight his theme that Jesus' messiahship is revealed primarily through humility and service, a denial of self that also effects humanity's salvation (10:45). Like the author of Hebrews, Mark sees Jesus' divine Sonship earned and perfected through suffering and death (Heb. 2:9–11; 5:7–10).

Pilate's Condemnation of Jesus At daybreak on Friday, the "whole council held a consultation" (15:1)—perhaps implying that the night meeting had been illegal and therefore lacked authority to condemn Jesus—and sends the accused to **Pontius Pilate,** the Roman prefect (governor) who was in Jerusalem to maintain order during Passover week. Uninterested in the Sanhedrin's charge that Jesus is a blasphemer, Pilate focuses on Jesus' reputed political crime, seditiously claiming to be the Jewish king. After remarking that it is Pilate himself who has stated the claim, Jesus refuses to answer further questions. Because Mark re-creates almost the entire Passion story in the context of Old Testament prophecies, it is difficult to know if Jesus' silence represents his actual behavior

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or the author's reliance on Isaiah 53, where Israel's suffering servant does not respond to his accusers (Isa. 53:7).

As Mark describes the proceedings, Pilate is extremely reluctant to condemn Jesus and does so only after the priestly hierarchy pressures him to act. Whereas the Markan Pilate maneuvers to spare Jesus' life, the historical Pilate (prefect of Judea from 26 to 36 CE), whom Josephus describes, rarely hesitated to slaughter troublesome Jews (cf. *Antiquities* 18.3.1–2; *The Jewish War* 2.9.4). When a mob demands that not Jesus but a convicted terrorist named **Barabbas** be freed, Pilate is pictured as having no choice but to release Barabbas (the first person to benefit from Jesus' sacrifice) and order the Galilean's crucifixion.

Jesus' Crucifixion Stripped, flogged, mocked, and crowned with thorns, Jesus is apparently unable to carry the crossbeam of his cross, so Roman soldiers impress a bystander, **Simon of Cyrene,** to carry it for him (15:16–21). Taken to **Golgotha** (Place of the Skull) outside Jerusalem, Jesus is crucified between two criminals (traditionally called "thieves" but probably brigands similar to those who formed the Zealot party in Mark's day). According to Pilate's order, his cross bears a statement of the political offense for which he is executed: aspiring to be the Jewish king—a cruelly ironic revelation of his true identity (15:22–32).

Mark's description of the Crucifixion is almost unendurably bleak (see Figure 7.8). To bystanders, who mock him for his assumed pretensions to kingly authority, Jesus—nailed to the cross—appears powerless and defeated (15:29–30). As Mark so darkly paints it, the scene is a tragic paradox: Despite the seeming triumph of religious and political forces allied against him, Jesus is neither guilty nor a failure. The failure lies in humanity's collective inability to recognize the sufferer's inestimable value, to see in him God's hand at work. To emphasize the spiritual blindness of Jesus' tormenters, Mark states that a midday darkness envelops the earth (15:33).

Unlike Luke or John, who show Jesus dying with serene confidence (see Box 10.7), Mark focuses only on Jesus' isolation and abandonment, making his last words (in Aramaic) a cry of despair: *"Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?"*—"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (15:34). In placing this question—a direct quotation of Psalm 22:1—on Jesus' lips, the author may echo a memory of Jesus' last words. Mark's main purpose, however, is probably to create a paradigm for Christians facing a similar fate and to show that out of human malice the divine goal is accomplished. From the author's perspective, there is an enormous disparity between what witnesses to the Crucifixion think is happening and the saving work that God actually achieves through Jesus' death. In Mark's eschatological vision, the horror of Jesus' agony is transformed by God's intervention to raise his son in glory.

Jesus' Burial

Although some scholars believe that Mark's wealth of concrete detail indicates that he drew on a well-developed oral form of the Passion story for his Gospel, others think that the narrative of Jesus' last week is basically a Markan composition. In contrast to the geographical vagueness of much of his Galilean narrative, the author's Passion account is full of the names of specific places and participants, from Gethsemane, to Pilate's courtyard, to Golgotha. As in all four Gospels, **Mary of Magdala** provides the key human link connecting Jesus' death and burial and the subsequent discovery that his grave is empty (15:40–41, 47; 16:1). **Joseph of Arimathea,** a mysterious figure introduced suddenly into the narrative, serves a single function: to transfer Jesus' body from Roman control to that of the dead man's disciples. Acquainted with Pilate, a member of the Sanhedrin and yet a covert supporter of Jesus' ministry, he bridges the two opposing worlds of Jesus' enemies and friends. Not only does Joseph obtain official permission to remove Jesus' body from the cross—otherwise, it would routinely

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FIGURE 7.8 *The Small Crucifixion.* Painted on wood by Matthias Grünewald (c. 1470–1528), this small version of Jesus' tortured death heightens the sense of the sufferer's physical pain and grief. Although his emphasis on Jesus' agony reflects Mark's account, Grünewald follows John's Gospel in showing Jesus' mother and the beloved disciple (as well as another Mary) present at the cross.

be consigned to an anonymous mass grave—but he also provides a secure place of entombment, a rock-hewn sepulcher that he seals by rolling a large, flat stone across the entrance (15:42–47).

Postlude: The Empty Tomb

Because the Jewish Sabbath begins at sundown on Friday, the day of Jesus' execution, the female disciples cannot prepare the corpse for interment until Sunday morning. Arriving at dawn, the women find the entrance stone already rolled back and the crypt empty except for the presence of a young man dressed in white. (Is he the same unidentified youth who fled naked from Gethsemane in 14:50–51?)

Mark's scene at the vacant tomb recalls themes recurring throughout his Gospel. Like the male disciples who could not understand Jesus' allusion to resurrection (9:9–10), the women are bewildered, unable to accept the youth's revelation that Jesus is "risen." Fleeing in terror, the women say "nothing to anybody" about what they have heard (16:8), leaving readers in suspense, wondering how the "good news" of Jesus' resurrection was ever proclaimed. The Gospel thus concludes with a frightened silence, eschewing any account of Jesus' post resurrection appearances (16:8).

Mark's Challenge to the Reader

Some interpreters suggest that the double failure of Jesus' disciples—the Eleven who desert him in Gethsemane and the Galilean women too paralyzed by fear to proclaim the good news of his resurrection—is intended to challenge the reader. If all Jesus' closest followers fail him, who but the readers, who now know conclusively that God has acted through their crucified Lord, can testify confidently that he is both Israel's Messiah and universal king (see Tolbert in "Recommended Reading")?

Mark's Inconclusiveness: Resurrection or Parousia?

Other commentators propose that Mark's belief in the nearness of Jesus' Parousia may explain why the risen Jesus does not manifest himself in the earliest Gospel. The mysterious youth in white tells the women how to find Jesus—the risen Lord has already started a posthumous journey "to Galilee," where Peter and the other disciples "will see him" (16:6–7). Some scholars think that Mark, convinced that the political and social chaos of the Jewish Revolt will soon climax in Jesus' return, refers not to a resurrection phenomenon but to the Parousia. Forty years after the Crucifixion, Mark's community may believe that their wandering through the wilderness is almost over: They are about to follow Jesus across Jordan into "Galilee," his promised kingdom.

Mark's inconclusiveness, his insistence on leaving his story open-ended, must have seemed as unsatisfactory to later Christian scribes as it does to many readers today. For perhaps that reason, Mark's Gospel has been heavily edited, with two different conclusions added at different times. All the oldest manuscripts of Mark end with the line stressing the women's terrified refusal to obey the young man's instruction to carry the Resurrection message to Peter. In time, however, some editors appended post resurrection accounts to their copies of Mark, making his Gospel more consistent with Matthew and Luke (Mark 16:8b and 16:9–20).

Summary

Christianity's first attempt to create a sequential account of Jesus' public ministry, arrest, and execution, Mark's Gospel includes relatively little of Jesus' teaching. Focusing on Jesus' actions—exorcisms, healings, and other miracles—the author presents his mighty works as evidence that God's kingdom has begun to rule, breaking up Satan's control over suffering humanity. Writing under the shadow of Roman persecution and the

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impending Roman destruction of Jerusalem, Mark presents Jesus as an eschatological Son of Man, who will soon reappear to judge all people.

Mark's ironic vision depicts Jesus as an unexpected and unwanted kind of Messiah who is predestined to be misunderstood, rejected, and crucified—a Messiah revealed only in suffering and death. God, however, uses humanity's blindness and inadequacy to provide a ransom sacrifice in his Son, saving humankind despite its attempts to resist him.

Questions for Review

1. According to tradition, who wrote the Gospel according to Mark? Why are modern scholars unable to verify that tradition? What themes in the Gospel suggest that it was composed after the Jewish Revolt against Rome had already begun?
2. Outline and summarize the major events in Jesus' public career, from his baptism by John and his Galilean ministry through his last week in Jerusalem. Specify the devices that Mark uses to connect the powerful miracle worker in Galilee with the seemingly powerless sacrificial victim in Jerusalem. Why does Mark devote so much space and detail to narrating the Passion story? Why does he have Jesus predict his own death three times?
3. Describe the three different categories Mark assigns the Son of Man concept. How is this concept related to earlier Jewish writings, such as the books of Ezekiel, Daniel, and 1 Enoch?
4. Define *parable,* and discuss Jesus' use of this literary form to illustrate his vision of God's kingdom. Why does Mark state that Jesus used parables to *prevent* people from understanding his message?
5. Explain a possible connection between the messianic secret concept and Mark's picture of the disciples as hopelessly inept and Jesus' opponents as mistakenly seeing him as the devil's agent. What devices does the author employ to convey his view that Jesus had to be misunderstood for him to fulfill God's plan?

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. How does the historical situation when Mark wrote help account for the author's portrait of Jesus as a suffering Messiah whose disciples must also expect to suffer? Would the wars, insurrections, and persecutions afflicting Mark's community have stimulated the author's sense of eschatological urgency?
2. Why does Mark paint so unflattering a picture of Jesus' Galilean family, neighbors, and disciples, all of whom fail to understand or support him? Do you think that the author is trying to disassociate Christianity from its Palestinian origins in favor of his Gentile church's understanding of Jesus' significance?
3. Do you think that Mark's emphasis on Jesus' exorcisms—his battle with cosmic evil—is an expression of the author's eschatology, his belief that in Jesus' activities God's kingdom has begun and the End is near? Explain your answer.
4. Discuss Mark's use of irony in his presentation of Jesus' story. List and discuss some incongruities between the spiritual reality that Jesus embodies and the way in which most people in the Markan narrative perceive him. In the literary world that Mark creates in his Gospel, how do appearance and reality conflict? How does Mark demonstrate that God achieves his purpose in Jesus even though political and religious authorities succeed in destroying him?
5. In your view, why does Mark end his Gospel so abruptly? Are there any clues in the Gospel that the author expects the Parousia to occur imminently? Are stories of Jesus' post resurrection appearances merely precursors of his return as eschatological judge?

Terms and Concepts to Remember

Abba
allegory
Andrew
apocalypse
baptism
Barabbas
Bartholomew
Caesarea Philippi
Caiaphas
Capernaum
Cephas
Christ
Christology
disciples
epiphany
eschaton
Eucharist
exorcism
Galilee
Gethsemane
Golgotha
Holy Spirit
Jairus
James
John the Baptist
Joseph of Arimathea
Judas Iscariot
kingdom of God
Last Supper
Mark
Mary of Magdala
Matthew

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messianic secret
Mount of Olives
Nazareth
oracles
parable
Passion
Passover
Pella
Peter
Philip
Pontius Pilate
Sabbath
Sanhedrin (Great Council)
Satan
Sea of Galilee
Second Coming (Parousia)
simile
Simon of Cyrene
Simon Peter
Son of God
Son of Man
Thaddeus
Thomas
Transfiguration
Zebedee [sons of thunder (Boanerges)]
Zoroastrianism

Recommended Reading

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CHAPTER 8

Matthew's Portrait of Jesus

A Teacher Greater Than Moses

Do not suppose that I have come to abolish the Law and the prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to complete. Matthew 5:17

Key Topics/Themes Most scholars agree that Matthew's Gospel is an expanded edition of Mark, which the author frames with accounts of Jesus' birth (chs. 1 and 2) and post resurrection appearances (ch. 28). Although retaining Mark's general sequence of events, Matthew adds five blocks of teaching material, emphasizing Jesus as the inaugurator of a New Covenant (26:26–29) who definitively interprets the Mosaic Torah and who, by fulfilling specific prophecies in the Hebrew Bible, proves his identity as Israel's Messiah. Written a decade or two after the Roman destruction of Jerusalem, Matthew somewhat softens Mark's portrait of an eschatological Jesus, adding parables that imply a delay in the Parousia (Second Coming) (chs. 24 and 25), an interval of indefinite length devoted to the missionary work of the church (*ekklesia*). Matthew's principal discourses include the Sermon on the Mount (chs. 5–7), instructions to the Twelve (ch. 10), parables of the kingdom (ch. 13), instructions to the church (ch. 18), and warnings of Final Judgment (chs. 23–25).

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Matthew's Relationship to the Hebrew Bible

If Mark was the first Gospel written, as most scholars believe, why does Matthew's Gospel stand first in the New Testament canon? The original compilers of the New Testament probably assigned Matthew the premier position for several reasons. It offers more extensive coverage of Jesus' teaching than any other Gospel, making it the church's major resource in instructing its members. In addition, Matthew's Gospel was particularly important to early church leaders because it is the Gospel most explicitly concerned with the nature and function of the **church** (Greek, *ekklesia*). The only Gospel even to use the term ***ekklesia,*** Matthew devotes two full chapters (chs. 10 and 18) to providing specific guidance to the Christian community.

The placement of Matthew's Gospel at the opening of the New Testament is also thematically appropriate because it forms a strong connecting link with the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament), albeit in a Greek edition. Matthew

initiates his account with a genealogy that associates Jesus with the most prominent heroes of ancient Israel. Beginning with Abraham, progenitor of the Hebrew people, Matthew lists as Jesus' ancestors celebrated kings like David, Solomon, and Josiah. The manner in which Matthew presents his record of Jesus' ancestors is typical of his use of the Hebrew Bible. His purpose is not only to establish Jesus' messianic credentials—by right of descent from Abraham and David—but also to present Jesus' birth as the climax of Israelite history. He therefore arranges Jesus' family tree in three distinct segments, each representing a particular phase of the biblical story. From the time of Abraham, bearer of the covenant promises for land, nationhood, and universal blessing (Gen. 12:1–3; 22:18), to that of David, bearer of the covenant promise of an everlasting line of kings (2 Sam. 7:16), is fourteen generations. From the time of David, whose prosperous kingdom is the high point of Israel's history, to the Babylonian exile, the lowest ebb of Israelite fortunes, is another fourteen generations. From the time of Babylonian captivity to the appearance of Jesus, who inherits all the promises made to Abraham and David, is also fourteen generations (Matt. 1:17). As fourteen generations intervened between Yahweh's vow to Abraham and the establishment of David's throne, so an equal span of time elapsed between the Babylonian overthrow of the Davidic line and the appearance of David's ultimate heir, the Messiah. Although the neatness of Matthew's numerical scheme conveys the author's sense of Jesus' crucial importance to the covenant people—and his view of the mathematically precise way in which God arranges Israel's history—closer examination of the genealogy raises some difficulties.

First, Matthew actually lists thirteen, not fourteen, generations between the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem and Jesus' birth. Second, one of Matthew's sources for the period between David and the exile, 1 Chronicles 3:10–12, reveals the names of several Davidic kings (at least three generations) that he omitted from the list, presumably to fit his desired sequence of fourteen. Finally, at the end of his genealogy, Matthew unexpectedly states that the line of royal descent directly connects not with Jesus, but with Joseph, who the writer believes was not Jesus' biological father. Somewhat paradoxically, Matthew concludes his list by noting that Jesus' paternal grandfather is "Jacob [father] of Joseph, the husband of Mary, who gave birth to Jesus called Messiah" (Matt. 1:16). The Evangelist may assume that Joseph is Jesus' legal and social parent, and thus can transmit his Davidic legacy to a nonrelative, perhaps through adoption, even if he did not transmit it genetically.

Writing independently of Matthew, Luke compiled a strikingly different genealogy, which further clouds the issue of Jesus' Davidic ancestry (Luke 3:25–38). Using many names not on Matthew's list, Luke states that people "thought" that Jesus was Joseph's son and that his paternal grandfather was Heli (not Jacob, as Matthew has it). Almost since the two Gospel

The Gospel According to Matthew

Author: Traditionally Matthew (also called Levi), one of the Twelve. Because the writer uses Mark as his primary source, scholars believe it unlikely that he was an apostolic witness to the events he describes. The work is anonymous.

Date: The 80s CE, at least a decade after the destruction of Jerusalem, when tensions between postwar Jewish leaders and early Christians provoked bitter controversy. The author, a Greek-speaking Christian Jew, penned the most violent denunciations of his fellow Jews in the New Testament.

Place of composition: Probably Antioch in Syria, site of a large Jewish and Jewish-Christian community.

Sources: Mark, Q, and special Matthean material (M).

Audience: Greek-speaking Jewish Christians and Gentiles who were, at least partly, Torah observant.

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genealogies were first published, Christians have sought to resolve their apparent disagreement, but although ingenious solutions have been proposed, none yet has been universally accepted. Whatever its historical credibility, the family tree with which Matthew begins his Gospel (and hence the New Testament itself) proclaims Jesus as the culminating figure in a long biblical tradition. As several scholars have observed, Matthew may have devised his genealogical pattern of fourteen for its messianic significance. Because Hebrew, like Greek and many other ancient languages, uses letters to signify numbers, each letter of the alphabet has a numerical value. In Hebrew, the three consonants making up David's name (DWD) total fourteen, which can function as the symbolic number of David's promised heir.

Although biblical genealogists uniformly recorded only the male line, linking fathers to sons, Matthew includes four female ancestors of Jesus—Tamar (1:3), Rahab (1:5), Ruth (1:5), and Bathsheba, "the wife of Uriah," who later became David's queen and the mother of King Solomon (1:6). Matthew's reasons for departing from biblical tradition are unclear, but scholars have found at least two factors that thematically bind these women together and that may have influenced the Evangelist's decision to list them as part of Jesus' heritage. Besides the fact that all four were Gentiles (Ruth was a Moabite, Tamar and Rahab Canaanites, and Bathsheba a Hittite), all four were also involved in irregular sexual activity. While Tamar posed as a prostitute to beguile her father-in-law into impregnating her (Gen. 38), Rahab actually plied the trade of a "harlot" in Canaanite Jericho (Josh. 2; 6). A young widow, Ruth seduced Boaz into marrying her (Ruth 1–4), and Bathsheba committed adultery with David, becoming his wife only after the king had arranged to have her husband Uriah slain in battle (2 Sam. 11–12; 1 Kings 1–2).

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Matthew states that, when Joseph discovered that his future bride, Mary, was already expecting a child, he planned to divorce her secretly to spare her public dishonor. He accepts Mary as his wife only after he dreams of an angel informing him that she had "conceived this child" by the "Holy Spirit" (1:18–25). Although Matthew connects Jesus with Abraham and David explicitly through Joseph, he also specifies that Mary is the sole human parent (1:16). As Matthew arranged Jesus' forebears in groups of fourteen to express divine providence at work, so he underscores the presence of ancestresses (and their male partners) with questionable pasts to illustrate God's unexpected use of flawed humanity to accomplish his purpose.

Matthew's wish to connect Jesus with the Hebrew Bible goes far beyond genealogical concerns. More than any other Gospel writer, he presents Jesus' life in the context of biblical law and prophecy. Throughout the entire Gospel, Matthew underscores Jesus' fulfillment of ancient prophecies, repeatedly emphasizing the continuity between Jesus and the promises made to Israel, particularly to the royal dynasty of David. To demonstrate that Jesus' entire career, from conception to resurrection, was predicted centuries earlier by biblical writers from Moses to Malachi, Matthew quotes from, paraphrases, or alludes to the Hebrew Bible at least 60 times. (Some scholars have detected 140 or more allusions to the Hebrew Scriptures.) Nearly a dozen times, Matthew employs a literary formula that drives home the connection between prophecy and specific events in Jesus' life: "All this happened in order to fulfill what the Lord declared through the prophet," Matthew writes, then citing a biblical passage to support his contention (1:22–23; 2:15, 23; see Box 8.1).

Matthew takes great pains to show that Jesus both taught and fulfilled the principles of the Mosaic Law (5:17–20). For these and other reasons, Matthew is usually regarded as the "most Jewish" of the Gospels. At the same time, the author violently attacks the leaders of institutional Judaism, condemning the Pharisees and scribes with extreme bitterness (ch. 23).

BOX 8.1 Representative Examples of Matthew's Use of the Septuagint (Greek) Version of the Hebrew Bible to Identify Jesus as the Promised Messiah

MATTHEW	HEBREW BIBLE SOURCE
All this happened in order to fulfill what the Lord declared through the prophet. (Matt. 1:22)	
1. The Virgin will conceive and bear a son, and he shall be called Emmanuel. (Matt. 1:22)	1. A young woman is with child, and she will bear a son and will call him Immanuel. (Isa. 7:14)
2. Bethlehem in the land of Judah, you are far from least in the eyes of the rulers of Judah; for out of you shall come a leader to be the shepherd of my people Israel. (Matt. 2:5–6)	2. But you, Bethlehem in Ephrathah, small as you are to be among Judah's clans, out of you shall come forth a governor for Israel, one whose roots are far back in the past, in days gone by. (Mic. 5:2)
3. So Joseph . . . went away . . . to Egypt, and there he stayed till Herod's death. This was to fulfill what the Lord had declared through the prophet: "I called my son out of Egypt." (Matt. 2:15)	3. When Israel was a boy, I loved him; I called my son out of Egypt. (Hos. 11:1) *[Hosea refers to the Exodus from Egypt, not a future Messiah.]*
4. Herod . . . gave orders for the massacre of all children in Bethlehem and its neighborhood, of the age of two years or less. . . . So the words spoken through Jeremiah the prophet were fulfilled: "A voice was heard in Rama, wailing and loud laments; it was Rachael weeping for her children, and refusing all consolation, because they were no more." (Matt. 2:16–18)	4. Hark, lamentation is heard in Ramah, and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her sons. She refuses to be comforted: they are no more. (Jer. 31:15)
5. He shall be called a Nazarene. (Matt. 2:23) *[This statement does not appear in the Hebrew Bible; it may be a misreading of Isaiah 11:1.]*	5. Then a shoot shall grow from the stock of Jesse, and a branch [Hebrew, *nezer*] shall spring from his roots. (Isa. 11:1)
6. When he heard that John had been arrested, Jesus withdrew to Galilee; and leaving Nazareth he went and settled at Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee, in the district of Zebulun and Naphtali. This was to fulfill the passage in the prophet Isaiah which tells of the land of Zebulun, the land of Naphtali, the Way of the Sea, the land beyond Jordan, heathen Galilee, and says: "The people that lived in darkness saw a great light: light dawned on the dwellers in the land of death's dark shadow." (Matt. 4:12–16)	6. For, while the first invader has dealt lightly with the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the second has dealt heavily with Galilee of the Nations on the road beyond Jordan to the sea: The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light: light has dawned upon them, dwellers in a land as dark as death. (Isa. 9:1–2)
7. And he drove the spirits out with a word and healed all who were sick, to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah: "He took away our illnesses and lifted our diseases from us." (Matt. 8:16–17)	7. Yet on himself he bore our sufferings, our torments he endured, while we counted him smitten by God, struck down by disease and misery. (Isa. 53:4)

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MATTHEW	HEBREW BIBLE SOURCE
All this happened in order to fulfill what the Lord declared through the prophet. (Matt. 1:22)	
8. Jesus . . . gave strict injunctions that they were not to make him known. This was to fulfill Isaiah's prophecy: "Here is my servant, whom I have chosen, my beloved on whom my favour rests; I will put my spirit upon him, and he will proclaim judgment among the nations. He will not strive, he will not shout, nor will his voice be heard in the streets. He will not snap off the broken reed, nor snuff out the smouldering wick, until he leads justice on to victory. In him the nations shall place their hope." (Matt. 12:16–21)	8. Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight, I have bestowed my spirit upon him, and he will make justice shine on the nations. He will not call out or lift his voice high, Or make himself heard in the open street. He will not break a bruised reed, or snuff out a smouldering wick; he will make justice shine on every race, never faltering, never breaking down, he will plant justice on earth, while coasts and islands wait for his teaching. (Isa. 42:1–4)
9. In all his teaching to the crowds, Jesus spoke in parables; in fact, he never spoke to them without a parable. This was to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah: "I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things kept secret since the world was made." (Matt. 13:34–35)	9. Mark my teaching, O my people, listen to the words I am to speak. I will tell you a story with a meaning, I will expound the riddle of things past, things that we have heard and know, and our fathers have repeated to us. (Ps. 78:2—*not* in Isaiah)
10. Jesus instructs his disciples to bring him a donkey and her foal. "If any speaks to you, say 'Our Master needs them'; and he will let you take them at once." This was to fulfill the prophecy which says, "Tell the daughter of Zion, 'Here is your king, who comes to you riding on an ass, riding on the foal of a beast of burden.'" (Matt. 21:2–5) *[Matthew shows Jesus mounted on two beasts—the donkey* and *her foal. See Luke 19:29–36, where a single mount is mentioned.]*	10. Rejoice, rejoice, daughter of Zion, shout aloud, daughter of Jerusalem; for see, your king is coming to you, his cause won, his victory gained, humble and mounted on an ass, on a foal, the young of a she-ass. (Zech. 9:9)
11. *[Judas returns the bribe—"thirty silver pieces"—given him to betray Jesus.]* . . . and in this way fulfillment was given to the saying of the prophet Jeremiah: "They took the thirty silver pieces, the price set on a man's head (for that was his price among the Israelites) and gave the money for the potter's field, so the Lord directed me." (Matt. 27:9–10)	11. *[Matthew is wrong in citing Jeremiah as the source of this passage, which, in the form he quotes it, does not appear in the Hebrew Bible. It is Zechariah who reports being paid "thirty shekels of silver," which he then donates to the Temple treasury:]* So they weighed out as my wages thirty shekels of silver. Then the Lord said to me, "Throw it into the treasury—this is the lordly price [the standard price of a slave] at which I was valued by them." So I took the thirty shekels of silver and threw them into the treasury in the house of the Lord. *[Jeremiah does record investing in a field near Jerusalem (Jer. 32:6–15) and refers to visiting a potter's house (Jer. 18:1–3), but neither he nor Zechariah provides support for Matthew's claim of prophetic fulfillment.]*

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Authorship, Purpose, Sources, and Organization

Who was the man so deeply interested in Jesus' practice of the Jewish religion and simultaneously so fierce in his denunciation of Jewish leaders? As in Mark's case, the author does not identify himself, suggesting to most historians that the Gospel originated and circulated anonymously. The tradition that the author is the "publican" or tax collector mentioned in Matthew 9:9–13 (and called "Levi" in Mark 2:14) dates from the late second century CE and cannot be verified. The main problem with accepting the apostle Matthew's authorship is that the writer relies heavily on Mark as a source. It is extremely unlikely that one of the original Twelve would have depended on the work of Mark, who was not an eyewitness to the events he describes.

The oldest apparent reference to the Gospel's authorship is that of Papias (c. 140 CE), whom Eusebius quotes: "Matthew compiled the Sayings [Greek, *logia*] in the Aramaic language, and everyone translated them as well as he could" (*History* 3:39:16). As many commentators have noted, the Sayings, or *logia,* are not the same as the "words" (Greek, *logoi*) of Jesus, nor are they the same as the Gospel of Matthew we have today. Whereas scholars once believed that Matthew's Gospel was first written in Aramaic by the apostle who was formerly a tax collector, modern analysts point out that there is no evidence of an earlier Aramaic version of the Gospel. Papias's use of *logia* may refer to an early collection of Jesus' sayings compiled by someone named Matthew, or it may allude to a list of messianic prophecies from the Hebrew Bible that a Christian scribe assembled to show that Jesus' life was foretold in Scripture. Most scholars do not believe that Papias's description applies to the canonical Gospel of Matthew.

Matthew and Judaism

The author remains unknown (we call him Matthew to avoid confusion), but scholarly analysis of his work enables us to gain some insight into his theological intentions and distinctive interests. Thoroughly versed in the Hebrew Bible, the writer is remarkably skilled at its exegesis (the explanation and critical interpretation of a literary text). Some scholars believe that he may have received scribal training, a professional discipline he utilizes to demonstrate to his fellow Jews that Jesus of Nazareth is the predicted Messiah. The author may refer to himself or to a "school" of early Christian interpreters of the Hebrew Scriptures when he states: "When, therefore, a teacher of the law [a scribe] has become a learner [a disciple] in the kingdom of Heaven, he is like a householder who can produce from his store both the new and the old" (13:52–53). Matthew effectively combines "the new" (Christian teaching) with "the old" (Judaism). To him, Jesus' teachings are the legitimate outgrowth of Torah study.

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Recent scholarly investigations have demonstrated that several varieties of Jewish Christianity existed in the first-century church. The particular type to which Matthew belongs can only be inferred from examining relevant aspects of his Gospel. Some Jewish Christians demanded that all Gentile converts to the new faith keep the entire Mosaic Law or at least undergo circumcision (Acts 15:1–6; Gal. 6:11–16). Matthew does not mention circumcision, but he insists that the Mosaic Torah is binding on believers (5:17–20). In his view, Christians are to continue such Jewish practices as fasting (6:16–18), regular prayer (6:5–6), charitable giving (6:2), and formal sacrifices (5:23). His account also implies that Mosaic purity laws, forbidding certain foods, apply to his community. Matthew includes Mark's report of Jesus' controversy with the Pharisees over ritual hand washing but omits Mark's conclusion that Jesus declares all foods ceremonially clean (cf. 15:1–20 with Mark 7:1–23, especially 7:19).

Matthew depicts Jesus' personal religion as Torah Judaism, but he has no patience with Jewish leaders who disagree with his conclusions. He labels them "blind guides" and hypocrites (23:13–28). Despite his contempt for

Jewish opponents, however, Matthew retains his respect for Pharisaic teachings and urges the church to "pay attention to their words" (23:3).

Like the writers at Qumran, the Essene community of monklike scholars who withdrew from the world to await the final battle between good and evil, Matthew interprets the prophecies of the Hebrew Bible as applying exclusively to his group of believers, whom he regards as the true Israel. He also commonly presents Jesus' teaching as a kind of midrash on the Torah. A detailed exposition of the underlying meaning of a biblical text, a **midrash** includes interpretations of Scripture's legal rules for daily life (called **Halakah**) and explanations of nonlegal material (called **Haggadah**). At various points in his Gospel, Matthew shows Jesus providing halakic interpretations of the Torah (5:17–48), particularly on such legal matters as Sabbath observance and divorce (12:1–21; 19:3–12).

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Matthew's Methods of Interpretation

Although contemporary scholars may flinch at the ideological way in which Matthew interprets ancient Scripture as specifically prophetic of Jesus, the Evangelist follows procedures that most Jewish scholars accepted in the first century CE. As David H. Stern reminds us, Jewish scribes and rabbis recognized "four basic modes" of biblical interpretation. The first mode (Hebrew, *P'shat,* "simple") analyzes a passage's literal meaning, taking into account both grammatical construction and historical context. In the second method (*Remez,* "hint"), rabbis examined individual words or phrases that offer clues to a significance not apparent in a literal reading. The third mode (*Drash* or *midrash,* "search") involves a particular reader's interpretation, a commonly figurative or allegorical response to the text that illuminates an individual's mind but may have little to do with the text's literal sense. The fourth approach (*Sod,* "secret") allows for a passage's "mystical or hidden meaning," perhaps suggested by individual letters or other minute details (see David H. Stern in "Recommended Reading"). As we have seen, Matthew freely employs all four interpretative techniques when applying texts from his Greek edition of the Hebrew Bible to Jesus' biography.

Date and Place of Composition

The Gospel gives few clues to its precise time of origin, but Matthew apparently refers to Jerusalem's destruction as an accomplished fact (22:7). The author's hostility to the Jewish leadership and references to "their" synagogues (9:35; 10:17; 12:9; 13:54) may suggest that he wrote after the Christians already had been expelled from Jewish meeting places, a process that occurred at many different synagogues during the 80s and 90s CE.

The oldest citations from Matthew's Gospel appear in the letters of Ignatius, who was bishop of Antioch in Syria about 110–115 CE. Ignatius's reference and the unusual prominence given **Peter** in this Gospel (Matt. 16:16–19) suggest that it originated in Antioch, a city in which Peter had great influence (Gal. 2:11–14). Although we lack conclusive evidence, many scholars favor Antioch as the place of Matthew's composition.

Founded by Greek-speaking Jewish Christians in the late 30s CE, during the first generation of Christianity, the Antioch church was second only to that in Jerusalem (Acts 11:19–26; 15:2–35). The Antiochean congregation was also the stage on which two different wings of the early Christian community waged a vigorous battle over the status of Gentile converts. Whereas Paul advocated total equality for Gentiles, James (called "the Lord's brother") took a decidedly more conservative stance, insisting that Gentiles keep at least some Torah restrictions. Peter seems to have occupied a middle position between James and Paul, permitting Gentiles into the group but drawing the line at close association with them, particularly if they did not observe kosher food laws. Matthew's Gospel reflects his community's historical movement away from exclusively Jewish Christianity and toward a ministry that focuses on Gentiles. In chapter 10, the Matthean Jesus

orders his disciples not to enter Gentile territories and to preach only to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (10:5–6). At the very end of his Gospel, however, Matthew pictures the risen Jesus issuing the **"great commission"**—to "make *all nations* my disciples" (28:19; emphasis added). Mediating between Torah-oriented traditions and a Hellenistic cosmopolitanism, Matthew produced a Gospel appropriate for his transitional generation, perhaps about 85 CE.

The Author's Purpose

In composing his Gospel, Matthew has several major objectives. Three of the most important are demonstrating Jesus' credentials as Israel's true Messiah; presenting Jesus as the supreme teacher and interpreter of the Mosaic Torah, the principles of which provide ethical guidance for Matthew's particular Jewish-Christian community; and instructing that community—the church—in the kind of correct belief and behavior that will ensure Jesus' approval when he returns.

Structure and Use of Sources

Matthew accomplishes his multiple purposes by assembling material from several different sources to construct his Gospel. Using Mark as his primary source, he incorporates about 90 percent of the earlier Gospel into his account. Into the Markan outline, Matthew inserts five large blocks of teaching material. Many ancient Jewish authors, consciously paralleling the Torah (the "five books of Moses"), arranged their works into fivefold divisions, as did the editors of the Psalms. The first of Matthew's five collections is the most famous, as well as the most commonly quoted—the Sermon on the Mount (chs. 5–7). The other four are instructions to the Twelve Apostles (ch. 10), parables on the kingdom (ch. 13), instructions to the church (Matthew's Christian community) (ch. 18), and warnings of the Final Judgment (chs. 23–25).

The Q Source Some of the material in these five sections is peculiar to Matthew, such as the parables involving weeds in a grain field (13:24–30) and the unforgiving debtor (18:23–35). Other parts are similar or virtually identical to material found in Luke but not in Mark. Scholars believe that Matthew and Luke, independently of each other, drew much of their shared teaching from the now-lost Q (*Quelle* [source]) document (see above). Containing a wide variety of sayings attributed to Jesus, including kingdom parables, instructions to the disciples, and (at least in its final edition) prophecies of impending judgment, the Q document hypothesis works well in accounting for the source of Jesus' sayings absent in Mark but present in both Matthew and Luke (see Box 6.3).

The M Source In addition to Mark and Q (assuming its historicity), Matthew uses material found only in his Gospel. Scholars designate this material unique to Matthew as **M** (Matthean). M includes numerous sayings and parables, such as the stories about the vineyard laborers (20:1–16) and many of the kingdom pronouncements in chapter 13 (13:24–30, 44–45, 47–52). Finally, Matthew frames his story of Jesus with a narrative of Jesus' birth and infancy (1:18–2:23) and a concluding account of two post resurrection appearances, the first to women near Jerusalem and the second to the "eleven disciples" in Galilee (28:8–20).

Matthew's Editing of Mark

Before considering passages found only in Matthew, we can learn something of the author's intent by examining the way in which he edits and revises Markan material (see Box 8.2). Although he generally follows Mark's chronology, Matthew characteristically condenses and shortens Mark's narrative. In fact, Matthew generally summarizes and abbreviates Mark's account, commonly correcting Mark's grammar or awkward phrasing. In the story of the epileptic boy, Matthew severely abridges Mark's version, recounting the episode in a mere five verses (17:14–18) compared with Mark's sixteen (Mark 9:14–29). Matthew is also significantly briefer in his telling of Jesus' healing of Peter's mother-in-law (8:14–15; Mark 1:29–31), the

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BOX 8.2 Examples of Matthew's Editing of Markan Material*

JESUS' BAPTISM

Mark: It happened at this time that Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized in the Jordan by John. At the moment when he came up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn open and the Spirit, like a dove, descending upon him. And a voice spoke from heaven: "Thou art my Son, my Beloved; on thee my favour rests." (Mark 1:9–11)

Matthew: Then Jesus arrived at the Jordan from Galilee, and came to John to be baptized by him. **John tried to dissuade him, "Do you come to me?" he said. "I need rather to be baptized by you." Jesus replied, "Let it be so for the present; we do well to conform in this way with all that God requires." John then allowed him to come.** After baptism Jesus came up out of the water at once, and at that moment heaven opened; he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove to alight upon him; and a voice from heaven was heard saying, "**This is my Son,** my Beloved, on whom my favour rests." (Matt. 3:13–17)

In comparing the two accounts of Jesus' baptism, the reader will note that Matthew inserts a speech by John into the Markan narrative. Recognizing Jesus as "mightier" than himself, John is reluctant to baptize him. By giving John this speech, Matthew is able to stress Jesus' superiority to the Baptist. Matthew also changes the nature of Jesus' experience of the "Spirit" after his baptism. In Mark, the heavenly voice is addressed directly to Jesus and apparently represents Jesus' own private mystical experience of divine sonship at the event. Matthew changes the "thou art," intended for Jesus' ears, to "this is," making the divine voice a public declaration audible to by-standers.

JESUS' RECEPTION BY HIS NEIGHBORS IN HIS HOMETOWN OF NAZARETH

Mark: He left that place and went to his home town accompanied by his disciples. When the Sabbath came he began to teach in the synagogue; and the large congregation who heard him were amazed and said,
"Where does he get it from?", and, "What wisdom is this that has been given him?", and, "How does he work such miracles? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James and Joseph and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?"
So they [turned against] him. Jesus said to them, "A prophet will always be held in honour except in his home town, and among his kinsmen and family." He could work no miracle there, except that he put his hands on a few sick people and healed them; and he was taken aback by their want of faith. (Mark 6:1–6)

Matthew: Jesus left that place, and came to his home town, where he taught the people in their synagogue.
In amazement they asked,
"Where does he get this wisdom from, and these miraculous powers? **Is he not the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary,** his brothers James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas? And are not all his sisters here with us? Where then has he got all this from?" So they [turned against] him, and this led him to say, "A prophet will always be held in honour, except in his home town, and in his own family." And **he did not work many miracles there: such was their want of faith.** (Matt. 13:54–58)

*Matthew's chief editorial changes are printed in boldface type.

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In editing Mark's account of Jesus' unsatisfactory reunion with his former neighbors in Nazareth, Matthew reproduces most of his source but makes some significant changes and deletions. He omits Mark's reference to the Sabbath, as well as Mark's brief list of Jesus' "few" deeds there and Jesus' apparent surprise at his fellow townsmen's refusal to recognize or trust in his powers. Matthew also substitutes the phrase "the carpenter's son" for Mark's "the son of Mary," with its implication of Jesus' illegitimacy. In both accounts, the Nazareans' familiarity with Jesus' background and family (naming four "brothers" and referring to two or more "sisters") is enough to make them skeptical of Jesus' claims to special wisdom or authority.

JESUS' STILLING OF A STORM

Mark: [Immediately after miraculously feeding the multitudes who had gathered to hear him preach, Jesus sends the disciples by boat across the Sea of Galilee to Bethsaida.] After taking leave of them [the crowds], he went up the hill to pray. It was now late and the boat was already well out on the water, while he was alone on the land. Somewhere between three and six in the morning, seeing them laboring at the oars against a head wind, he came toward them, walking on the lake. He was going to pass by them; but when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought it was a ghost and cried out; for they all saw him and were terrified.

But at once he spoke to them: "Take heart! It is I; do not be afraid." Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind dropped. At this they were utterly astonished, for they had not understood the incident of the loaves; their minds were closed. (Mark 6:45–52)

Matthew: As soon as they had finished, he made the disciples embark and cross to the other side [of the Sea of Galilee] ahead of him, while he dismissed the crowd; then he went up the hill by himself to pray. It had grown late, and he was there alone. The boat was already some distance from the shore, battling a head wind and a rough sea. Between three and six in the morning he came towards them, walking across the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake they were so shaken that they cried out in terror: "It is a ghost!" But at once Jesus spoke to them: "Take heart! It is I; do not be afraid."

Peter called to him: "Lord, if it is you, tell me to come to you over the water." "Come," said Jesus. Peter got down out of the boat and walked over the water towards Jesus. But when he saw the strength of the gale he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, "Save me, Lord!" Jesus at once reached out and caught hold of him. "Why did you hesitate?" he said. "How little faith you have!" Then they climbed into the boat; and the wind dropped. **And the men in the boat fell at his feet, exclaiming "You must be the Son of God."** (Matt. 14:22–33)

Besides adding the episode involving Peter's impetuous attempt to imitate Jesus' power over nature, Matthew radically changes the disciples' reaction to their Master's miraculous control of the sea, symbol of primal chaos. Whereas the Markan disciples fail to perceive Jesus' divinity in his ability to subdue wind and storm—Mark says that "their minds were closed"—the Matthean disciples immediately recognize Jesus as "Son of God." Matthew's editorial changes reflect not only his promotion of Peter's importance (see Matt. 16:13–19) but also his tendency to picture the disciples as better role models than Mark had portrayed them.

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Gerasene demoniac (8:28–34; Mark 5:1–20), and the resuscitation of Jairus's daughter and the curing of the woman with a hemorrhage (9:18–26; Mark 5:21–43). In abbreviating Mark's version of events, Matthew typically omits much physical detail, as well as Jesus' emotional responses to the situation.

Emphasis on the Miraculous and Supernatural At the same time that he shortens Mark's description of Jesus' miracles, Matthew heightens the miraculous element, stressing that Jesus effected instant cures (9:22; 15:28; 17:18). In recounting Jesus' unfriendly reception in Nazareth, Matthew changes Mark's observation that Jesus "could work no miracle there" (Mark 6:5) to the declaration that "he did not work many miracles there," eliminating the implication that the human Jesus could be weakened by others' unbelief (13:58) (see Box 8.2). He similarly omits Mark's definition of John's baptism as a rite "in token of repentance, for the forgiveness of sins" (3:2, 6, 11; Mark 1:4). Mark's exact phrase, "for the forgiveness of sins," does appear in Matthew, but it is transferred to the Matthean Jesus' explanation of the ceremonial wine at the Last Supper (26:26–28). The author may have effected this transposition to make sure his readers understood that "forgiveness of sin" comes not from John's baptism but from Jesus' expiatory death.

Matthew's edition of the Passion narrative also intensifies the supernatural element. In Gethsemane, the Matthean Jesus reminds his persecutors that he has the power to call up thousands of angels to help him (26:53), a claim absent from Mark. Matthew's Christ allows himself to be arrested only to fulfill Scripture (26:54).

Matthew also revises Mark's crucifixion account, inserting several miracles to highlight the event's cosmic significance. To Mark's plague of darkness and the rending of the Temple curtain, Matthew adds a violent earthquake, severe enough to open graves and permit suddenly resuscitated **"saints"** (holy persons) to rise and walk the streets of Jerusalem (27:50–53). (This mysterious raising of saints is not mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament but probably appears here to express Matthew's conviction that Jesus' death makes possible the resurrection of the faithful.) Matthew introduces yet another earthquake into his description of the first Easter morning, stating that the women disciples arrive at Jesus' tomb in time to see a divine being descend and roll away the stone blocking the tomb entrance. Mark's linen-clad youth becomes an angel before whom the Roman guards quake in terror (28:1–4). What Mark's account implies, Matthew's typically makes explicit, ensuring that the reader will not miss the hand of God in these happenings. Nor does Matthew leave the Galilean women wondering and frightened at the empty sepulcher. Instead of being too terrified to report what they have seen, in Matthew's version the women joyously rush away to inform the disciples (28:8; Mark 16:8). In this retelling, the women set the right example by immediately proclaiming the good news of Jesus' triumph over death (28:19).

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Organization of Matthew's Gospel

Because of the complex nature of the Matthean composition and the skill with which the author has interwoven Mark's narrative with Jesus' discourses (from Q and M), it is difficult to reduce Matthew to a clear-cut outline. Separating the book into convenient divisions and subdivisions in conventional outline form tends to distort and oversimplify its interlocking themes. One can, however, identify some of the major parts that make up the Gospel whole.

The following gives a rough idea of Matthew's general structure:

1. Introduction to the Messiah: genealogy and infancy narratives (1:1–2:23)
2. The beginning of Jesus' proclamation: baptism by John; the temptation by Satan; inauguration of the Galilean ministry (3:1–4:25)
3. First major discourse: the Sermon on the Mount (5–7)
4. First narrative section: ten miracles (8:1–9:38)
5. Second major discourse: instructions to the Twelve Apostles (10)

6. Second narrative section: the Baptist's questions about Jesus; controversies with Jewish authorities (11:1–12:50)
7. Third major discourse: parables on the kingdom (13:1–52)
8. Third narrative section: from the rejection in Nazareth to the Transfiguration (13:53–17:27)
9. Fourth major discourse: instructions to the church (18)
10. Fourth narrative section: the Jerusalem ministry (19:1–22:46)
11. Fifth major discourse: warnings of Final Judgment (23–25)
12. Fifth and final narrative section: the Passion story and post resurrection appearances (26:1–28:20)

Except for the birth narratives and final post resurrection apparitions, even a minimal outline makes clear that Matthew tells essentially the same story that we find in Mark and Luke (see Box 6.1). Only by carefully scrutinizing Matthew's handling of his sources, the Hebrew Bible, Mark, M, and (presumably) Q can we appreciate the ways in which his Gospel is distinctive (see Boxes 8.3 and 8.4).

BOX 8.3 Representative Examples of Material Found Only in Matthew

A "Table of Descent" [genealogy] listing Jesus' ancestors (1:1–17)
Matthew's distinctive version of Jesus' miraculous conception and birth at Bethlehem (1:18–2:23)
Some parables, sayings, and miracles unique to Matthew:
The dumb demoniac (9:32–34)
Wheat and darnel [weeds] (13:24–30)
Buried treasure (13:44)
The pearl of "special value" (13:45)
Catching fish in a net (13:47–50)
A learner with treasures old and new (13:51–52)
Earthly rulers collecting taxes (17:25–26)
Finding a coin in a fish's mouth to pay Temple taxes (17:27)
The unforgiving debtor (18:23–35)
Equal wages for all vineyard laborers (20:1–16)
The two sons and obedience (21:28–32)
The improperly dressed wedding guest (22:11–14)
The wise and foolish virgins (25:1–13)
The judgment separating sheep from goats (25:31–46)
Judas and the chief priests (27:3–10)
The dream of Pilate's wife (27:19)
The resurrection of saints (27:52–53)
The Easter morning earthquake (28:2)
The chief priests' conspiracy to deny Jesus' resurrection (28:11–15)

BOX 8.4 New Characters Introduced in Matthew

Joseph, husband of Mary (1:16, 18–25; 2:13–14, 19–23)
Herod the Great, Roman-appointed king of Judea (ruled 40–4 BCE) (2:1–8, 16–19)
The Magi (astrologers or "wise men" from the east) (2:1–12)
Satan, the devil (as a speaking character) (4:1–11)
Two blind men (9:27–31)
A dumb demoniac (9:32–34)
Revised list of the Twelve (10:1–4)
The mother of James and John, sons of Zebedee (20:20–21)

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Introduction to the Messiah: The Infancy Narrative

Except for Matthew and Luke, no New Testament writers refer even briefly to the circumstances of Jesus' birth. Nor do Matthew and Luke allude to Jesus' infancy in the main body of their Gospels. In both cases, the infancy narratives are self-contained units that act as detachable prefaces to the central narrative of Jesus' public ministry.

Matthew constructs his account (1:18–2:23) with phrases and incidents taken from a Greek edition of the Hebrew Bible. To him, the infant Messiah's appearance gives new meaning to ancient biblical texts, fulfilling prophecy in many unexpected ways. The child is born to a virgin made pregnant by the Holy Spirit (1:18–19). To the author, this fulfills a passage from Isaiah 7:14, which in Hebrew states that "a young woman is with child, and she will bear a son." Matthew, however, quotes not the original Hebrew-language version of the text, but an Old Greek translation in which "young woman" is rendered as *parthenos,* or "virgin." Historians believe that Isaiah's words originally referred to the birth of an heir to the then-reigning Davidic king, but Matthew sees them as forecasting the Messiah's unique manner of birth. Like other New Testament writers, Matthew reads the Hebrew Bible from an explicitly Christian viewpoint, consistently giving the Jewish Scriptures a Christological interpretation. By making almost the entire Hebrew Bible foreshadow the Christ event, Matthew transforms it retroactively into a Christian document.

Matthew's concern to anchor Jesus' entrance into life firmly in the context of Scripture fulfillment is evident in his account of the mysterious **Magi,** or "wise men" from the east who come to pay homage to the infant Jesus. Traditionally three in number (although Matthew does not say how many they were), the Magi were probably Babylonian or Persian astrologers who had studied the horoscope of Judah and concluded that it was then time for "the king of the Jews" to be born. Astrology was extremely popular with all classes of society in Greco-Roman times, and it was commonly believed that the appearance of unusual celestial bodies, such as comets or "falling stars," heralded the occurrence of major events on earth (Isa. 14:12–23; Job 38:23; Judg. 5:20).

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Matthew's reference to the "star" that guides the Magi to Jesus' birthplace is puzzling. Modern scientists do not know what astronomical phenomenon Matthew has in mind, but a conjunction of the planets Jupiter and Saturn in the constellation Pisces (7 BCE) may have been seen as a divine "sign" or portent. (No other New Testament writer or contemporary historian alludes to the "star of Bethlehem.") Noting that the star "stops" to hover over Jesus' birthplace (2:10)—behavior impossible for a genuine celestial body—some commentators suggest that Matthew invites his readers to believe that an angel (traditionally likened to a star [Isa. 40:26; Rev. 12:4, 9]) actually directs the Magi.

In the Evangelist's account, the unnamed heavenly body leads the traveling astrologers to create a situation in which several biblical prophecies can be fulfilled. On reaching Jerusalem, the astrologers are brought before King Herod, who recognizes that their inquiry about a new Jewish king refers to the Messiah's birth in **Bethlehem,** King David's home city, foretold in Micah 5:2.

Herod's jealous attempt to kill the child (2:1–18) fulfills prophecy (Jer. 31:15), as does the holy family's flight into Egypt (Hos. 11:1). Matthew structures the entire episode to parallel the biblical story of Moses' infancy (Exod. 1:8–2:25). As the baby Moses survived the Egyptian pharaoh's murderous schemes, so the infant Jesus escapes another ruler's plot to kill God's chosen one. The analogy between the two figures is also intended to apply to Jesus' adult life. Like Moses, Jesus will be summoned from Egypt to deliver his people. Moses led Israel from Egyptian slavery to a covenant relationship with God; Jesus will free believers from sin and establish a New Covenant (2:13–15, 19–21; 19:27–29).

The Beginning of Jesus' Proclamation

Matthew gives no information about Jesus' life from the time of his family's settling in Nazareth (2:22–23) to the appearance of John the Baptist, a gap of approximately thirty years (Luke 3:1, 23). Although he starts his account of Jesus' adult career (3:1–4:25) at exactly the same point as Mark (1:1–13), Matthew edits Mark's baptism narrative to emphasize Jesus' superiority to John and to avoid any implication that Jesus needed forgiveness of previous sins (3:1–17). (See Figures 8.1 and 8.2 for two distinctly different interpretations of the young Jesus.)

The Temptation

Mark (1:12–13) briefly alludes to Satan's tempting Jesus, but Matthew expands the scene to include a dramatic dialogue between Jesus and the Evil One (4:1–11). Whether he is viewed as an objective reality or a metaphor signifying human failure to obey God, Matthew's Satan attempts to deflect Jesus from the true course of his messiahship.

As Matthew and Luke (4:1–13) present it, the confrontation with Satan serves to clarify Jesus' concept of his messianic role. Representing false notions of the Messiah, Satan prefaces his first two challenges with the phrase "If you are the Son of God," a mean-spirited attempt to capitalize on any doubts that the human Jesus may have experienced about his origins or his future authority as God's agent. The first temptation involves Jesus' personal hunger: Satan calls for Jesus to test the extent of his miraculous power by turning stones into bread, a ploy Jesus refutes by quoting the Torah principle that one lives spiritually on the word of God (Deut. 8:3). Some modern commentators have suggested that Jesus thereby rejects the temptation to undertake a messiahship exclusively focused on material good works, although he makes feeding the hungry and destitute an important part of his ministry.

The second temptation is a profound challenge to Jesus' consciousness of his own messianic identity. "If you are the Son of God," Satan demands, show that you can fulfill the terms of Psalm 91, a poem that unconditionally asserts that God will save from all harm the man he has chosen.

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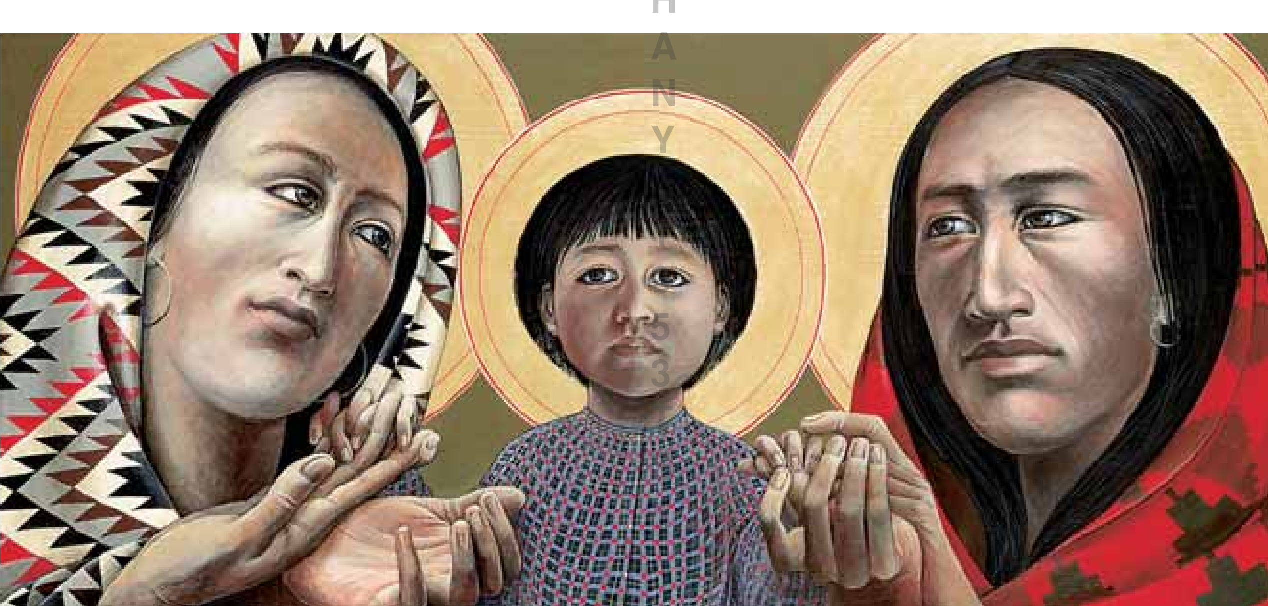

FIGURE 8.1 *The Holy Family.* In depicting Jesus, Mary, and Joseph as indigenous Americans, the twentieth-century painter Fr. John B. Giuliani emphasizes both the archetypal sacredness of the family and the tradition of spirituality attained by pre-Columbian peoples of North America.

FIGURE 8.2 *The Good Shepherd.* This early Christian painting of Christ can be found on the ceiling of a crypt in the catacombs of Saint Priscilla in Rome. Note that the artist portrays Jesus in a pose that would be familiar to a Greco-Roman audience. Like earlier renditions of Apollo, the Greek god of prophecy, intellect, music, and shepherds, the youthful Jesus carries a lamb on his shoulders to demonstrate his concern for his human flock. Compare John 10:1–18, Matthew 18:12–14, and Luke 15:4–7.

> For you the LORD [Yahweh] is a safe retreat;
> you have made the Most High your refuge.
> No disaster shall befall you,
> no calamity shall come upon your home.
> For he [Yahweh] has charged his angels
> to guard you wherever you go,
> to lift you on their hands
> for fear you should strike your foot
> against a stone.
>
> (Ps. 91:9–12)

The poem continues to reassure God's favorite that Yahweh will "lift him beyond danger" and "rescue him and bring him to honour" (Ps. 91:14–16). In Matthew's time, many Jews must have pointed out to Christians that Jesus' death on the cross was entirely contrary to the promises of divine protection given in this well-known psalm. In Matthew 4:6, the devil quotes this Scripture, and Jesus counters this "demonic" use of the Bible by citing the general Torah principle of not putting God to the test (Deut. 6:16).

In a third and final attempt to subvert Jesus' understanding of his messianic role, Satan offers him worldly power on a vastly grander scale than King David, the Messiah's prototype, had enjoyed. All Jesus must do in return is "pay homage" to Satan, a demand that Jesus recognizes as undermining the essence of Judaism's commitment to one God (Deut. 6:13). A thousand years earlier, David had gained his kingdom through war and bloodshed, a procedure that Jesus recognizes as unsuitable to the Messiah, who will not impose his rule by cruelty and violence. Satan is not to be "worshiped" by imitating his methods.

First Major Discourse: The Sermon on the Mount

In the temptation scene (4:1–11), Matthew shows Jesus repudiating some of the functions then popularly associated with the Messiah. In the **Sermon on the Mount** (chs. 5–7), Matthew demonstrates how radically different Jesus' concept of this messiahship is from the popular expectation of a conquering warrior-king. This long discourse, in which Jesus takes his seat on a Galilean hill, reminding the reader of Moses seated on Mount Sinai, is the New Testament's most extensive collection of Jesus' teachings. Matthew's "sermon" is not the record of a single historical speech by Jesus, but a compilation of Jesus' sayings from several different sources. Some of the same teachings appear in Luke's

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Sermon on the Plain, the Third Gospel's equivalent version of the discourse (Luke 6:17–7:1). Matthew collects the sayings in one place (5:1–8:1); Luke scatters them throughout his Gospel narrative (see Chapter 9).

In Matthew's opening discourse, Jesus addresses both the undifferentiated "crowds" that gather to hear him and a much smaller group of disciples who sit at his feet. Challenging his audience to practice a "higher righteousness," exceeding even that of the most scrupulous Pharisees (5:20), he calls on them to express God-like love, radiating "light for all the world" (5:15–16, 43–48). Jesus begins by summoning those who will most benefit from his teaching—the needy, the unsatisfied, the grieving, and the persecuted—many of whom now seem permanently excluded from the "good things" God's world provides. In the sermon's first section, known as the **Beatitudes,** Matthew's Jesus pronounces a blessing on "those who know their need of God," "those who hunger and thirst to see right prevail," and "those who show mercy" (5:3, 6, 7). Because Luke's version of the Beatitudes applies Jesus' blessings to the literally poor and hungry (see Box 9.4), many scholars think that Matthew has modified the original import of these sayings by "spiritualizing" them.

For both Matthew and Luke, however, the Beatitudes express a radical reversal of the world's social values that will prevail in God's kingdom (which, in Matthew, is represented by the church). Whereas society presently exalts the rich, the powerful, and the successful, particularly military conquerors victorious in war, Jesus reverses these common value judgments, congratulating those who seek divine justice rather than material acquisitions, "those of a gentle spirit," and those who are "peacemakers." These are the citizens of God's dominion, who will inherit both the earth (5:5) and the "kingdom of Heaven" (5:3), people whom God calls his children (5:9).

Immediately after the Beatitudes and his designation of Christians as the "salt of the earth" and "light" to the world, Matthew emphasizes Jesus' crucial role as upholder and interpreter of the Mosaic Law. In a statement probably aimed at Pauline churches that did not observe Torah commandments (see Chapters 15 and 17)—and which appears only in Matthew's Gospel—the Matthean Jesus declares:

> Do not suppose that I have come to abolish the Law and the prophets; I did not come to abolish [as Paul maintains in Galatians], but to complete. I tell you this: so long as heaven and earth endure, not a letter, not a stroke, will disappear from the Law until all that must happen has happened.
>
> (5:17–18)

Aware that Paul's churches did not share a conviction that the Torah was eternally binding, Matthew concedes that nonobservant believers may still belong to the kingdom (the church), although they will rank significantly below Torah loyalists:

> If any man therefore sets aside even the least of the Law's demands, and teaches others to do the same, he will have the lowest place in the kingdom of Heaven, whereas anyone who keeps the Law, and teaches others so, will stand high in the kingdom of Heaven.
>
> (Matt. 5:19)

The Antitheses

For Matthew's Jewish Christian community, Jesus' teachings did not replace the Mosaic Law; they intensified it. Rather than serving as a refutation of Jewish tradition, Jesus' Torah pronouncements illustrate how his disciples should observe it, emphasizing the essential core of ethical meaning that lies behind each commandment. Immediately after his declaration of the Law's unchanging validity, Matthew introduces a set of Jesus' sayings, known as the **antitheses,** that are found only in his Gospel. Employing a rhetorical formula, Jesus makes an initial statement (the thesis), which he then follows with an apparently opposing idea (the antithesis). In this series, he appears to contrast biblical tradition with his own authoritative opinion; as scholars have pointed out, however,

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he does not contradict Torah rules, but rather interprets them to reveal the human motivation that often causes them to be broken:

> You have learned that our forefathers were told, "Do not commit murder: anyone who commits murder must be brought to judgment." But what I tell you is this: Anyone who nurses anger against his brother must be brought to judgment. If he abuses his brother, he must answer for it to the court; if he sneers at him he will have to answer for it in the fires of hell [Gehenna].
>
> (5:21–22)

Anger, the emotion triggering murderous aggression, must be rooted out, for if it leads to overt behavior, it will be punished by both human courts and divine judgment.

In another antithesis, Jesus looks beyond the literal application of a Torah command to seek a more effective way to obey the principle it embodies:

> You have learned that they [the biblical Israelites] were told, "Eye for eye, tooth for tooth." But what I tell you is this: Do not set yourself against the man who wrongs you. If someone slaps you on the right cheek, turn and offer him your left. If a man wants to sue you for your shirt, let him have your coat as well. If a man in authority makes you go one mile, go with him two.
>
> (5:38–41)

The ***lex talionis,*** or law of retaliation, that Jesus quotes before giving his three examples of recommended behavior is central to the Mosaic concept of justice and appears in three different Torah books (Exod. 21:23–25; Lev. 24:19–20; Deut. 19:21). Although it may seem harsh by today's standards, in ancient society the *lex talionis* served to limit excessive revenge: Simply receiving an injury did not entitle one to kill the offending party. In the world inhabited by the (generally poor and powerless) members of Jesus' audience (the "you" whom he addresses), however, retaliatory actions of any kind against those who exploited them automatically led to severe reprisals, including torture and death. Recognizing that the law's intent was to curb violence, Jesus goes beyond its literal application to demand that his listeners give up their traditional right to retaliate in kind. Is Jesus, then, urging people to submit passively to those who wrong them?

Although many commentators have interpreted Jesus' emphasis on nonviolence as tantamount to accepting injustice, some interpreters, such as Walter Wink, suggest an alternative reading. Instead of advocating a "slave morality" that would make it easier for the strong to abuse the weak, Wink argues that Jesus was instructing his audience on how to deal with people who exercised power over them. Jesus' remark on slapping is directed to classes of people who customarily receive demeaning treatment: slaves who are struck by masters; wives, by their husbands; children, by their parents; or a conquered people, such as the Jews, by their Roman overlords. According to Wink, Jesus advised a simple technique by which mistreated people could react without violence and yet retain their human dignity. Because it was customary to strike a social inferior with the back of the right hand, turning the other cheek made it difficult for the aggressor to repeat the blow in the same way. (Hitting with the fist was supposedly ruled out, since it implied that one was striking an equal.)

Jesus' advice to a poor person whom a wealthy creditor sues in court similarly offers a means to shame the exploiter. When a creditor demands the outer garment (here translated as "shirt") to pay off a debt, the debtor should strip off the inner tunic ("coat") as well. Standing naked before the debt collector in full public view would, according to social standards of the era, have been more humiliating to the creditor than to his victim, who had dramatically illustrated the other's excessive avarice. Jesus' counsel to go an "extra mile" refers to the legal practice that entitled a Roman soldier to force a peasant to carry his pack for a mile—but no farther. By voluntarily carrying the pack beyond the legally stipulated distance, the carrier would place his oppressor in an awkward position, causing the soldier to exceed his legal mandate

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and thus blurring the distinction between the "man in authority" and the servant he had conscripted (see Wink in "Recommended Reading").

Other commentators suggest that Jesus' main objective was probably to discover and apply the essential precepts contained in the Mosaic tradition. Matthew's version of the "golden rule" most succinctly expresses this view: His Jesus states that treating others as one would like to be treated by them encapsulates the biblical message, succinctly embodying "the Law and the prophets" (7:12; cf. Luke 6:31). Similarly, after reciting the Torah injunctions to love God and neighbor wholeheartedly, Jesus states, "Everything in the Law and the prophets hangs on these two commandments" (22:34–40; cf. Mark 12:28–34).

In Matthew's final antithesis, Jesus expands on this fundamental perception, contrasting the command to love one's neighbor (Lev. 19:18) with the apparently common assumption that it is permissible to hate an enemy (5:43–48). Again, he demands a "higher righteousness" that will imitate God's own character, revealed in the daily operation of physical nature, where he lavishes his gifts equally on both deserving and undeserving people:

> But what I tell you is this: Love your enemies and pray for your persecutors; only so can you be children of your heavenly Father, who makes his sun rise on good and bad alike, and sends the rain on the honest and dishonest. If you love only those who love you, what reward can you expect? . . . There must be no limit to your goodness, as your heavenly Father's goodness knows no bounds.
>
> (5:44–48)

"Boundless" in loving generosity, the Father provides the supreme model for Jesus' disciples to emulate, refashioning them in his image. In seeking first the kingdom and God's "justice" (6:33), they personally "pass no judgment" on others, for judgmental attitudes blind people to their own defects (7:1–5). Instead, disciples must focus on the infinite graciousness of the Father, who endlessly "gives good things to those who ask him" (7:9–11).

Jesus' Authority

The sermon ends with Jesus' parable about the advantages of building one's life firmly on the rock of his teachings (7:24–27), after which, Matthew reports, the crowds "were astounded" because "unlike their own teachers he taught with a note of [his personal] authority" (7:28). Matthew's phrase "when Jesus had finished this discourse," or a variation thereof, marks the conclusion of each of the four other blocks of teaching material in his Gospel (11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1).

First Narrative Section: Ten Miracles

In the first long narrative section of his Gospel (8:1–9:38), based largely on Mark, Matthew concentrates on depicting Jesus' miraculous healings and exorcisms. To Mark's account of the cleansing of a leper (Mark 1:40–45), Matthew adds the story of a **centurion,** the highest-ranking noncommissioned Roman army officer (8:5–13; see also Luke 7:1–10). Matthew connects this episode with references to the practice of converting Gentiles that existed in the author's own day. After expressing Jesus' astonishment that the Gentile soldier reveals a faith stronger than that of any Israelite, the author makes his point: Non-Jews like the centurion will come to feast with Abraham and the other patriarchs, and Jews, once the favored people, will be left outside. Throughout his Gospel, Matthew pictures the Christian community as the "true Israel," inheritors of the divine promise made to the ancient Israelites.

Second Major Discourse: Instructions to the Twelve Apostles

In his second major collection of ethical teachings, Matthew presents Jesus' instructions to the twelve chief disciples (listed by name in 10:2–4).

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The author specifies that the Twelve are sent exclusively to Jews and forbidden to preach to Gentiles or Samaritans (10:5–6), an injunction found only in Matthew. (In contrast, both Luke and John show Jesus leading his disciples on a brief Samaritan campaign [Luke 9:52–56; John 4:3–42].) The Twelve are to preach the kingdom's imminent appearance, the same apocalyptic message that the author attributes to both the Baptist (3:2) and Jesus at the outset of his career (4:17). While healing the sick, cleansing lepers, and raising the dead—thus replicating Jesus' spectacular miracles—the disciples are to expect hostility and persecution. This extended warning (10:16–26) seems to apply to conditions that existed in the author's generation, rather than in the time of Jesus' Galilean ministry. Matthew's apparent practice of combining Jesus' remembered words with commentary relating them to later experiences of the Christian community is typical of all the Gospel writers.

A strong eschatological tone pervades the entire discourse. Followers are to be loyal at the time of testing because destruction in Gehenna awaits the unfaithful. The New Testament name for a geographical location, the **"Valley of Hinnom,"** Gehenna is commonly rendered as "hell" in English translations, although it is uncertain that the later Christian notion of a metaphysical place of punishment accurately expresses the original meaning of Gehenna (see Box 8.5). A site of human sacrifice in Old Testament times (Jer. 7:32; 1 Kings 11:7, etc.), the Valley of Hinnom later housed a garbage dump that was kept permanently burning, a literal place of annihilation for "both soul and body" (Matt. 10:28; 18:8; 25:30, 46, etc.).

Equally arresting is the statement that before the Twelve have completed their circuit of Palestine "the Son of Man will have come" (10:23). Writing more than half a century after the events he describes, Matthew surprisingly retains a prophecy that was not fulfilled, at least not in historical fact. The author's inclusion of this apocalyptic prediction indicates that he may not have understood it literally. Matthew may have regarded the "Son of Man" as already spiritually present in the missionary activity of the church. If so, this suggests that many of Matthew's other references to "the end of the age" and Jesus' Parousia (chs. 24 and 25) are also to be understood metaphorically.

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Second Narrative Section: Questions and Controversies

Jesus and John the Baptist

Matthew opens his second extended narrative (11:1–12:50) by discussing the relationship of Jesus to John the Baptist, whose fate foreshadows that of Jesus. Locked in Herod Antipas's prison and doomed to imminent martyrdom, John writes to inquire if Jesus is really God's chosen one (11:2–3). The Baptist's question contrasts strangely with his earlier proclamation of Jesus' high status (3:11–15) and may reflect a later competition between the disciples of Jesus and John in Matthew's day.

Matthew uses the incident to place the two prophets' roles in perspective, highlighting Jesus' superiority. Without answering John's question directly, Jesus summarizes his miracles of healing that suggest God's presence in his work (11:4–6). Matthew then contrasts the function and style of the two men, emphasizing Jesus' far greater role. Although John is the "destined Elijah" whose return to earth was to inaugurate the time of Final Judgment, he does not share in the "kingdom." Perhaps because Matthew sees John operating independently of Jesus, he does not consider him a Christian. (Box 8.6 indicates the four Gospel authors' strikingly different views of John's role.)

John is a wild and solitary figure; Jesus is gregarious, friendly with Israel's outcasts, prostitutes, and "sinners." Enjoying food and wine with socially unrespectable people, Jesus provokes critics who accuse him of gluttony and overdrinking (11:7–19). In Matthew's evaluation, neither John nor Jesus, representing two very different approaches to the religious life, can win the fickle public's approval.

BOX 8.5 Matthew's Use of Hell: Some Biblical Concepts of the Afterlife

The term that many English-language Bibles translate as "hell" is **Gehenna** (*gē hinnōm*) (Matt. 5:22, 29–30; 10:28; 23:15, 33), which originally referred not to a place of posthumous torment but to a specific geographical location, a ravine near Jerusalem. A valley bordering Israel's capital city on the southwest, Gehenna was named for the "sons of Hinnom (*gē ben(e) hinnōm*)," the biblical designation of an ancient Canaanite group that occupied the site before King David captured it about 1000 BCE. Gehenna had an evil reputation as the place where humans were sacrificed and burned as offerings to false gods, a practice that Israelite prophets vehemently condemned (Jer. 7:31; 19:11; 32:35; cf. 2 Kings 23:10; 2 Chron. 28:3; 33:5).

In time, perhaps influenced by Persian ideas about afterlife punishments in fire, some Jewish writers made Hinnom's valley (Gehenna) the symbol of God's eschatological judgment, where the wicked would suffer after death (1 Enoch 26:4; 27:2–3). A potent image of alienation from God, the earthly Gehenna was eventually associated with mythical concepts of an Underworld "lake of fire," the future abode of unrepentant sinners (2 Esd. 7:36; Rev. 20).

SHEOL AND HADES

The concept of eternal punishment does not occur in the Hebrew Bible, which uses the term **Sheol** to designate a bleak subterranean region where the dead, good and bad alike, subsist only as impotent shadows. When Hellenistic Jewish scribes rendered the Bible into Greek, they used the word *Hades* to translate Sheol, bringing a whole new mythological association to the idea of posthumous existence. In ancient Greek myth, Hades, named after the gloomy deity who ruled over it, was originally similar to the Hebrew Sheol—a dark place underground in which all the dead, regardless of individual merit, were indiscriminately housed (see Homer's *Odyssey,* book 11). By the Hellenistic period, however, Hades had become compartmentalized into separate regions: These included Elysium, a paradise for the virtuous, and Tartarus, a place of punishment for the wicked. Influenced by philosophers such as Pythagoras and Plato and by the Orphic mystery religions (see Chapter 4), Greek religious thought eventually posited a direct connection between people's behavior in this life and their destiny in the next: Good actions earned them bliss, whereas injustices brought fearful penalties.

HELL

Popular concepts of hell derive from a variety of sources extending back in time to the earliest Mesopotamian and Egyptian speculations about the terrors of the next world. Although the concept is absent from the Hebrew Bible and most of the New Testament, a few scattered references to it (primarily involving Gehenna or a fiery lake) appear in the Synoptic Gospels and the Book of Revelation, as well as some noncanonical Jewish and Christian books, such as 1 and 2 Enoch and the Apocalypse of Peter. In general, pre-Christian mythologies and other extrabiblical sources supply most of the frightening imagery for such celebrated literary works as Dante's *Inferno* and Milton's *Paradise Lost,* as well as the "hellfire" sermons of many Puritan divines and their modern successors. The word itself, not found in the Bible, commemorates Hel, the fierce Norse goddess who reigned over the netherworld.

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Harsh Sayings

At the same time that he shows Jesus performing works of mercy and forgiveness (11:28–30), Matthew also includes harsh sayings very similar to the denunciations and threats of divine judgment uttered by the Baptist. When the towns of Chorazin and Bethsaida fail to repent

BOX 8.6 John the Baptist as the Eschatological Elijah Figure

MATTHEW

He is the man of whom Scripture says, "Here is my herald, whom I send on ahead of you, and he will prepare your way before you." I tell you this: never has there appeared on earth a mother's son greater than John the Baptist, and yet the least in the kingdom of Heaven is greater than he.

Ever since the coming of John the Baptist the kingdom of Heaven has been subject to violence and violent men are seizing it. For all the prophets and the Law foretold things to come until John appeared, and John is the destined Elijah, if you will but accept it. If you have ears, then hear. (Matt. 11:10–14)

MARK

[Popular speculations about John's return to life after his beheading by Herod Antipas:]
Now King Herod heard of it [Jesus' miracles], for the fame of Jesus had spread; and people were saying, "John the Baptist has been raised to life, and that is why these miraculous powers are at work in him." Others said, "It is Elijah." (Mark 6:14–15)

LUKE

He is the man of whom Scripture says, "Here is my herald, whom I send on ahead of you, and he will prepare your way before you." I tell you, there is not a mother's son greater than John, and yet the least in the kingdom of God is greater than he. (Luke 7:27–28)

Until John, it was the Law and the prophets; since then, there is the good news of the kingdom of God, and everyone forces his way in. (Luke 16:16)

JOHN

This is the testimony which John gave when the Jews of Jerusalem sent a deputation of priests and Levites to ask him who he was. He confessed without reserve and avowed, "I am not the Messiah." "What then? are you Elijah?" "No," he replied. "Are you the prophet whom we await?" He answered "No."* "Then who are you?" they asked. "We must give an answer to those who sent us. What account do you give of yourself?" He answered in the words of the prophet Isaiah: "I am a voice crying aloud in the wilderness, 'Make the Lord's highway straight.'" (John 1:19–23)

*Note that John's Gospel denies the Baptist the roles of prophet and latter-day Elijah that the Synoptics accorded him.

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after witnessing Jesus' miracles there, Jesus makes a sweeping statement that **Sodom,** which Yahweh destroyed by fire, would fare better on Judgment Day than they (11:20–24). Castigating his opponents as poisonous snakes (12:33–37), Jesus seems to echo the ferocity of John's earlier diatribes (3:7–13; cf. Luke 3:7–9).

Third Major Discourse: Parables on the Kingdom

Matthew frames Jesus' third discourse with his version of Jesus' alienation from his family (12:46–50; Mark 3:31–35) and Jesus' rejection by the citizens of Nazareth (13:54–58; Mark 6:1–6). The author divides Jesus' parable teachings into two distinct episodes, the first public and the second private (13:10–23). Although only the Twelve are initiated into the secrets of God's rule, Matthew softens Mark's explanation of Jesus' reasons for using parables in public. Instead of employing figures of speech to prevent understanding (Mark 4:11–12), Matthew states that Jesus speaks metaphorically *because* most people have the wrong attitude and unconsciously shut their mental eyes and ears (13:11–15; Isa. 6:9–10). Matthew's version of the parable lesson explicitly states that the Twelve do understand and appreciate Jesus' teaching (13:16–17, 51–52), thus eliminating Mark's view of the disciples' chronic stupidity.

To Mark's original collection of kingdom parables, Matthew adds several comparisons in which the kingdom is likened to a buried treasure, a priceless pearl, a harvest of fish, and a field in which both grain and "darnel" (weeds) grow (13:24–30, 36–50). The last two introduce a distinctly Matthean concept: The kingdom (church) consists of a mixture of good and bad elements that will not be separated completely until the last day. The same theme reappears in Matthew's version of the parable about ungrateful guests (22:1–13; cf. Luke 14:16–23).

Third Narrative Section: From the Rejection in Nazareth to the Transfiguration

Revisions of Mark's Narrative

Matthew's third narrative section (13:53–17:27) slightly revises many incidents related in Mark's Gospel. Recounting Jesus' rejection by his fellow citizens of Nazareth, Matthew subtly modifies Mark's older account, calling Jesus "the carpenter's son" rather than the Markan "son of Mary" (Mark 6:3) and changing Mark's statement that Jesus "could work no miracle there" (Mark 6:5) to "did not work many miracles there" (13:54–58) (see Box 8.2).

With minor changes, Matthew generally follows Mark's account of the Baptist's execution, the miraculous feeding of 5,000 people, and the stilling of the Galilean storm (14:1–27; Mark 6:14–52). Matthew's editing of this part of the Markan narrative, however, entails a major change in Mark's order of events. The episode in which Jesus sends the Twelve on a missionary journey (Mark 6:7–13) does not appear in Matthew's third narrative section because he has already incorporated it into his version of Jesus' instructions to the Twelve (ch. 10). Matthew also revises other Markan passages dealing with the disciples. He embellishes Mark's account of Jesus' striding across the Sea of Galilee by adding that Peter also attempted to walk on water. More significantly, Matthew deletes Mark's reference to the disciples' "closed" minds, or "hard-heartedness," and replaces it with their positive recognition of Jesus as "Son of God" (14:28–33; Mark 6:52). He further modifies Mark's theme of the disciples' obtuseness by insisting that the Twelve fully comprehend the miracle of loaves and fishes (15:5–12; Mark 8:1–21). Most of these revisions to Mark's account—especially Matthew's deletion of Mark's criticisms of the Twelve—serve to enhance the disciples' role and reputation.

Describing Jesus' dispute with the Pharisees over ritual hand washing (taken from Mark 7:1–23), Matthew gives the debate a meaning significantly different from that in his Markan source. In Mark, the episode's climax is reached when the author interprets Jesus' words to mean that all foods are clean, including those the Torah forbids Jews to eat (7:19). Believing that dietary laws remain in effect, Matthew drops Mark's climactic interpretation (15:1–11).

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Peter and the Church

One of Matthew's most celebrated additions to Mark's narrative appears in his version of Peter's recognition of Jesus' identity (16:13–29). Matthew's Peter not only acknowledges Jesus as the Messiah but also identifies him as the Son of God (an element absent in Mark). Jesus' declaration that Peter is the rock upon which Jesus will build his church appears only in Matthew, as does the promise to award Peter spiritual powers that are honored in heaven and on earth. Matthew's Jesus, however, makes no provision for the transmission of ecclesiastical authority to Peter's successors.

Despite his singling Peter out as foremost among the **apostles** ("ones sent out [by Jesus]"), Matthew retains Mark's tradition that Peter fundamentally misunderstands the nature of Jesus' messiahship. When Peter attempts to dissuade Jesus from a decision that will lead to his death in Jerusalem, Jesus again ironically addresses the apostle as "Satan" (16:21–23).

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Fourth Major Discourse: Instructions to the Church

In chapter 18, Matthew assembles disparate sayings of Jesus and applies them to the Christian community of the writer's generation. Taken together, chapters 10 and 18 form a rudimentary instruction manual for the early church. The author skillfully combines numerous small literary units to achieve his intended effect. A brief glimpse of the disciples' squabbling for power (18:1–2) introduces opposing images of a powerless child and a drowning man (18:2–7), which are quickly followed by pictures of self-blinding and the flames of Gehenna (18:8–9). The variety of literary forms gathered here makes the author's prescription for an ideal Christian community intensely vivid. The writer's devices include hyperbole (exaggeration for rhetorical effect), parable (the lost sheep and the unforgiving debtor [18:12–14, 23–35]), advice on supervising troublesome people (18:15–17), prophetic promises (18:10, 18–20), and direct commands (18:22). In Matthew's view of the church, service, humility, and endless forgiveness are the measure of leadership. Practicing the spirit of Torah mercy, the church is the earthly expression of divine rule (18:23–35), a visible manifestation of the kingdom.

In regulating the community, Matthew gives the individual "congregation" the right to exclude or ostracize disobedient members (18:15–17). During later centuries, this power of excommunication was to become a formidable weapon in controlling both belief and behavior. The same authority accorded Peter in Jesus' famous "keys of the kingdom" speech (16:16–20) is also given to individual congregation leaders (18:18).

Fourth Narrative Section: The Jerusalem Ministry

In this long narrative sequence (19:1–22:46), Matthew arranges several dialogues between Jesus and his opponents, interspersed with incidents on the journey south from Galilee to Jerusalem. The section opens with "some Pharisees" challenging Jesus on the matter of divorce. In Mark's version of the encounter, Jesus revokes the Torah provisions for divorce and forbids remarriage (Mark 10:1–12). Matthew modifies the prohibition, stating that "unchastity" or sexual unfaithfulness provides grounds for lawful divorce (19:3–9). He also adds a discussion with the disciples in which Jesus mentions several reasons for not marrying, including a commitment to remain single for "the kingdom" (19:10–12).

Discipleship and Suffering

After the third prediction of Jesus' impending death in Jerusalem (20:17–19), Matthew again emphasizes that suffering must precede the disciples' heavenly reward, as it does Jesus'. In Mark, the sons of Zebedee, James and John, directly ask Jesus for positions of honor in his kingdom,

presumably to satisfy personal ambition (Mark 10:35–40). In Matthew's version of the episode, it is the apostles' mother who makes the request on their behalf (20:20–21). (Jesus had already promised his followers that he would share his heavenly rule with them [19:27–29].) The prediction that the two sons of Zebedee will follow their leader to a martyr's death indicates that Matthew wrote after both apostles had died (20:23). According to Acts (12:1–2), James was beheaded by **Herod Agrippa I,** who reigned as king of Judea 41–44 CE. It may be that John was also executed at about that time.

Entrance into Jerusalem

Matthew prepares his readers for the significance of Jesus' Jerusalem experience by prefacing his account with a miracle found only in his Gospel. After Jesus restores sight to two blind men, they immediately become his followers—in contrast to the "blind" guides of Jerusalem (20:29–34). The author's determination to show that Jesus' actions match biblical prophecy in every detail causes him to create a somewhat bizarre picture of his hero's entrance into the holy city. Matthew quotes Zechariah's prophecy about the Messiah's arrival in full and inserts an additional phrase from Isaiah. However, he apparently misunderstands Zechariah's poetic use of parallelism. In Zechariah's poetic structure, "the foal of a beast of burden" on which the Messiah rides is parallel to and synonymous with the prophet's reference to "an ass" (Zech. 9:9; Isa. 62:11). To make Jesus' action precisely fit his concept of the prophecy, Matthew has Jesus mount not one but two animals simultaneously, "the donkey and her foal," for his triumphant ride into Jerusalem (21:1–11).

In his account of Jesus' Jerusalem ministry, Matthew generally adheres to Mark's narrative, although he adds some new material and edits Mark, usually to enhance his portrait of Jesus. After driving the moneychangers from the Temple, Jesus heals some blind men and cripples (21:14), miracles absent in Mark. During this brief period, Jesus is repeatedly hailed as "Son of David," one of Matthew's chief designations for his hero (1:1; 20:30; 21:9, 16). Matthew reproduces many of the Markan debates between Jesus and Jewish Torah experts on matters such as payment of taxes to Rome (22:16–22), the resurrection (22:23–33), and the law of love (22:34–40). However, he significantly edits Mark's report on Jesus' encounter with a friendly Torah instructor (Mark 12:28–34). Whereas Mark states that this congenial exchange prevented further attacks on Jesus, Matthew transfers Mark's comment to the conclusion of Jesus' remarks about the Messiah as David's "son" (22:46; Mark 12:35). Matthew has only harsh words for the Jerusalem authorities and declines to show Jesus on good terms with rival Jewish teachers.

The Church as the True Israel

While studying Matthew's account of Jesus' last days, readers will discover that most of the author's changes and additions to Mark serve to express his extreme hostility toward Jewish leaders. In the author's bitter view, prostitutes and criminals stand a better chance of winning divine approval than do the Temple priests, Pharisees, or their associates (21:31).

The three parables that Matthew inserts into the Markan narrative serve to condemn the Jewish establishment. In the parable of the two sons, the disobedient youth represents Jewish leaders (21:28–32). In a second parable, the "wicked tenants" who kill a landlord's son are the Jerusalem officials who reject Jesus (21:42–46). To Matthew, the vineyard owner's transfer of his estate to more deserving tenants means that God now regards the church as his covenant people.

Matthew replays the same theme in the parable featuring guests who ungratefully ignore their invitations to a wedding party (the messianic banquet). Matthew's statement that the outraged host then burns down the ingrates' city probably refers to the Romans' burning Jerusalem in 70 CE. As in the wicked tenant parable, newcomers replace the formerly chosen group—the Jewish Christian church becomes the true Israel (22:1–10).

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Fifth Major Discourse: Warnings of Final Judgment

Hostility Toward the Jewish Establishment

This fifth and final block of teaching material summarizes the Matthean Jesus' adverse judgment on Jerusalem, particularly its Temple and religious hierarchy (chs. 23–25). It opens with a blistering denunciation of the **scribes and Pharisees**—professional transmitters and interpreters of the law—upon whom Jesus is pictured as heaping **"seven woes,"** perhaps corresponding to the curses on a disobedient Israel listed in Deuteronomy 28. According to Matthew, Jesus blames the Pharisees and their associates for every guilty act—every drop of innocent blood poured out—in Israel's entire history. He condemns the religious leadership to suffer for their generation's collective wrongdoing, as well as that of their distant ancestors.

Matthew implies that the Roman devastation of Jerusalem in 70 CE, an event that occurred during the author's lifetime, is tangible proof of God's wrath toward Israel (23:35–36). Matthew intensifies this theme in his version of Jesus' trial before Pilate (ch. 27); only in Matthew does a Jerusalem crowd, demanding the Messiah's crucifixion, hysterically invite the Deity to avenge Jesus' blood upon them and their children (27:25). Matthew further revises Mark's Passion narrative by adding that Pilate, symbol of imperial Rome, washed his hands of responsibility for Jesus' death—even while ordering Jesus' execution (27:24). All four Gospel writers shift the blame from the Roman government to the Jewish leadership, but only Matthew extends responsibility to the Jews' as-yet-unborn descendants.

Many commentators find an ethical paradox in Matthew's vindictive attitude toward his fellow Jews who did not accept Jesus as the national Messiah. Earlier in his Gospel, Matthew presents Jesus as repudiating the *lex talionis* (5:38–40), stressing instead the necessity of practicing infinite forgiveness (6:12, 14–16; 18:21–35) and exercising mercy (5:7). In dealing with his church's opponents, however, Matthew judges without compassion, apparently regarding Jewish rejection of his Messiah as falling beyond the tolerable limits of charity. The author, in effect, reintroduces the old law of retaliation that Jesus himself rejected. Historically, the consequences of New Testament writers attributing collective guilt to the Jewish people helped fuel the waves of anti-Semitism that repeatedly swept through the Western world for centuries afterward. Throughout Europe, Jews were indiscriminately persecuted as "Christ-killers," often with the blessing of ecclesiastical authorities.

Since the Holocaust of World War II, when Nazi Germany led a campaign of genocide against European Jews, killing approximately 6 million men, women, and children, a number of church leaders—Catholic, Protestant, and Greek Orthodox—have publicly condemned the practice of anti-Semitism. In 1974, the Roman Catholic Church officially reminded Christendom that modern Jews are not responsible for Jesus' crucifixion.

To place Matthew's negative verdict on the first-century Jewish establishment in historical perspective, we must remember that he condemns only the Jerusalem leadership, not Judaism itself. Despite his dislike of Pharisaic customs, the author agrees with Pharisaic teaching. He reminds his readers to "pay attention to their words" and "do what they tell you," for they occupy "the seat of Moses" and their teachings are authoritative (23:1–3).

The Fall of Jerusalem and the Parousia

Signs of the Times The second part of Jesus' fifth discourse is based largely on Mark 13, the prediction of Jerusalem's impending destruction. Whereas Mark states that the disciples asked only about when the Temple would fall (Mark 13:1–4), Matthew expands the disciples' question to include an eschatological inquiry into Jesus' Second Coming (the **Parousia**) and the "end of the age," the close of human history as

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we know it (24:1–3). Jesus' reply is a good illustration of how first-century Jewish eschatology was incorporated into the Christian tradition.

Matthew's presentation of the "signal" or "signs" leading to Jesus' return is a complex mixture of first-century historical events, such as the Jewish War, and prophetic images from the Hebrew Bible, particularly Daniel, Joel, Zechariah, and the pseudepigraphical 1 Enoch. All three Synoptic writers link the Jewish Revolt against Rome (66–73 CE) with supernatural portents of End time and Jesus' reappearance. Mark, the first to make this association of events, seems to have written at a time when the revolt had already begun (note the "battles" and "wars" in 13:7–8) and Jerusalem was about to fall. These cataclysmic events he called "the birth pangs of the new age." Both Matthew and Luke follow Mark's lead and connect these political upheavals with persecution of believers, perhaps allusions to Nero's cruel treatment of Roman Christians (c. 64–65 CE) or Zealot violence against Jewish Christians who refused to support the revolt. The Synoptic authors concur that attacks on the church, then a tiny minority of the Greco-Roman population, are of critical importance. The sufferings of the Christian community will bring God's vengeance on all humanity.

Matthew follows Mark in referring to the mysterious "abomination of desolation" as a warning to flee Judea (24:15), perhaps echoing a tradition that Jewish Christians had escaped destruction by leaving the holy city and seeking refuge in Pella, east of Jordan (see Box 7.6). In his version of Mark's eschatological prediction, however, Luke omits the "abomination" sign and substitutes an allusion to Roman armies besieging Jerusalem (Luke 21:20–24).

Both Mark and Matthew are aware that in the white heat of eschatological expectation there were "many" false reports of the Messiah's return (Mark 13:21–23; Matt. 24:23–27). Some Christians must have experienced crushing disappointment when their prophets' "inspired" predictions of Jesus' reappearance failed to materialize. Thus, both Evangelists caution that even "the Son" does not know the exact date of the Parousia (Mark 13:32; Matt. 24:36). Matthew adds that when the Son does return, his coming will be unmistakable in its universality, "like lightning from the east, flashing as far as the west" (24:27).

Matthew preserves the "double vision" nature of the Parousia found in Mark. Jesus' supernatural coming will be preceded by unmistakable "signs" that it is near (24:21–22, 29–35); at the same time, he will come without warning and when least expected (24:42–44). Although contradictory, both concepts apparently existed concurrently in the early church, which was deeply influenced by eschatological thinking.

Although the author of Revelation connects End time with cosmic catastrophe, other New Testament writers (perhaps aware of the repeated failure of attempts to calculate the date of the Parousia) state that the Son's return is essentially unheralded (1 Thess. 5:1–5; 2 Peter 3:10).

Matthew probably wrote almost two decades after Mark's Gospel was composed, but he retains the Markan tradition that persons who knew Jesus would live to see his predictions come true (24:34; Mark 13:30). To Matthew, the Roman annihilation of the Jewish state, which coincided with the emergence of the Christian church as an entity distinct from Judaism, may essentially have fulfilled Jesus' words, or at least an important part of his prophecy. From the writer's perspective, the "New Age" had already dawned with Jerusalem's fall and the church's new role in future human history (28:19–20).

Parables of Jesus' Return Chapters 24 and 25 contain three parables and a prophetic vision of Jesus' unannounced Parousia. Whatever their original meaning to Jesus, in Matthew they serve to illustrate believers' obligation to await faithfully and patiently their absent Lord's return. The first parable contrasts two servants, one of whom abuses his fellow employees until the master suddenly reappears to execute him (24:45–51)—a clear warning to church members to treat others honorably. The parable about a delayed bridegroom similarly contrasts two kinds of believers: those who are alert and prepared for the wedding event and those who are not. Because the

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"bridegroom" is "late in coming," Matthew implies that Christians must reconcile themselves to a delay in the Parousia (25:1–13).

The parable of the talents, in which a master's servants invest huge sums of money for him, probably had a quite different meaning before Matthew used it as a warning illustration of Jesus' delayed return. The master in the parable is a "hard man" who reaps what he does not sow and who inspires terror in his servants. In the context of Jesus' original telling, he was most likely an absentee landowner who amassed enormous profits from his slaves' labor and who punished them severely if they failed to make him enough money. For Matthew, Jesus' parable dramatizing the Palestinian aristocracy's economic exploitation translates into a reminder that the master's servants (transformed into Christian workers) must be productive while awaiting the Parousia, increasing Jesus' treasure (recruiting new members for the church) (25:14–30).

The fourth and final judgment parable concerns not only the church but also "the nations." The term *nations* refers primarily to Gentiles living without the Mosaic Law, but it may be intended to include all humanity—Jews, Christians, and those belonging to other world religions as well. In the parable about separating worthy "sheep" and unworthy "goats," all are judged exclusively on their behavior toward Jesus' "little ones," Matthew's favored term for Christian disciples (25:31–46) (see Figure 8.3).

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FIGURE 8.3 *Christ Separating Sheep from Goats.* This early-sixth-century mosaic illustrates Matthew's parable of eschatological judgment (Matt. 25:31–46). At his Parousia (Second Coming), an enthroned Jesus, flanked by two angels, divides all humanity into two mutually exclusive groups. The sheep are gathered in the favored position at Jesus' right hand, whereas the goats, at Jesus' left, are condemned to outer darkness for their failure to help others.

Matthew's eschatological vision makes charitable acts, rather than "correct" religious doctrines, the standard in distinguishing good people from bad. In such passages, Matthew reflects the ancient Israelite prophets, who regarded service to the poor and unfortunate as acts of worship to God. The Book of James, which defines true religion as essentially humanitarian service to others (James 1:27), espouses a similar view.

The Author's Purpose in the Judgment Parables By adding the four parables of judgment to his expansion of Mark 13 and by linking them to "the kingdom" (25:1, 14), Matthew shifts the apocalyptic emphasis from expectations about the Parousia to the function and duties of the church. Matthew links the parables of the alert householder, the trustworthy servant, and the talents with Jesus' predictions of the *eschaton*. In contrast, Luke, who uses the same parables, places them among the general teachings of Jesus' pre-Jerusalem ministry (cf. Matt. 24:43–44 with Luke 12:39–40; Matt. 24:45–51 with Luke 12:42–46; and Matt. 25:14–30 with Luke 19:12–27).

Fifth and Final Narrative Section: The Passion Story and Resurrection

Matthew retells the story of Jesus' last two days on earth (Thursday and Friday of Holy Week) with the same grave and solemn tone we find in Mark. To the Gospel writers, Jesus of Nazareth's suffering, death, and resurrection are not only the most important events in world history but also the crucial turning point in humanity's relation to God. Although Matthew's Passion narrative (26:1–28:20) closely follows Mark's sequence of events, he adds a few new details, probably drawn from the oral tradition of his community. The treachery of Judas Iscariot is emphasized and linked to the fulfillment of a passage in Jeremiah, although the relevant text actually appears in Zechariah (Matt. 26:14–15, 20–25, 47–50; 27:3–10; Jer. 32:6–13; Zech. 11:12–13). The theme of a warning dream, used frequently in the birth story, is reintroduced when Pilate's wife, frightened by a dream about Jesus, urges her husband to "have nothing to do with that innocent man" (27:19).

Miraculous Signs

To emphasize that the very foundations of the world are shaken by the supreme crime of crucifying God's son, Matthew reports that an earthquake accompanies Jesus' last moment and triggers a resurrection of the dead (27:50–53), an eschatological phenomenon usually associated with the Final Judgment. Although the author presumably includes the incident to show that Jesus' death opens the way for humanity's rebirth, neither he nor any other New Testament writer explains what eventually happens to the reanimated corpses that leave their graves and parade through Jerusalem.

The Centurion's Reaction

Whereas Mark reports that only one Roman soldier recognizes Jesus as God's son, Matthew states that both the centurion and his men confess Jesus' divinity (27:54). Perhaps Matthew's change of a single man's exclamation to that of a whole group expresses his belief that numerous Gentiles will acknowledge Jesus as Lord.

The Empty Tomb

Despite some significant differences, all three Synoptic Gospels agree fairly closely in their account of Jesus' burial and the women's discovery of the empty tomb. Matthew, however, adds details about some Pharisees persuading Pilate to dispatch Roman soldiers to guard Jesus' tomb. According to Matthew, the Pharisees are aware of Jesus' promise to rise from the grave "on the third day" and so arrange for a Roman guard to prevent the disciples from stealing the

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body and creating the false impression that Jesus still lives. In Matthew's account, the Romans guarding the tomb on Sunday morning actually see an angel descend from heaven, a sight that paralyzes them with terror. (See Chapter 20 for a discussion of the noncanonical Gospel of Peter, which describes Jesus' actual resurrection.)

The Plot to Discredit the Resurrection

After the women discover the empty gravesite and then encounter Jesus himself, some guards report what has happened to the Jerusalem priests. According to Matthew, the Sadducean priests then plot to undermine Christian claims that Jesus has risen by bribing the soldiers to say that the disciples secretly removed and hid Jesus' corpse (27:62–66; 28:11–15).

Matthew implies that the Jews of his day used the soldiers' false testimony to refute Christian preaching about the Resurrection. However, his counterargument that the Roman soldiers had admitted falling asleep while on duty is not convincing. Severe punishment, including torture and death, awaited any Roman soldier found thus derelict. In 79 CE, only a few years before Matthew wrote, soldiers guarding the gates of Pompeii preferred being buried alive during the cataclysmic eruption of Mount Vesuvius to facing the consequences of leaving their posts without permission. Some commentators believe that a rumor about the possible theft of Jesus' body may have circulated, but probably not for the reasons that Matthew gives. (For a different view, see Wright in "Recommended Reading.")

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Post Resurrection Appearances and the Great Commission

In Mark's Gospel, Jesus promises that after his death he will reappear to the disciples in Galilee (Mark 14:28; 16:7). After recording the women's dawn encounter with the risen Lord, Matthew then reports that Jesus also appeared to the Eleven at a prearranged mountain site in Galilee. Matthew observes that some disciples had doubts about their seeing Jesus, as if mistrusting the evidence of their own senses. The author seems to imply that absolute proof of an event so contrary to ordinary human experience is impossible.

Even though some disciples doubt, all presumably accept the final command of the One whose teachings are vindicated by his resurrection to life: They, and the community of faith they represent, are to make new disciples throughout the Gentile world (28:16–20). This commission to recruit followers from "all nations" further expresses Matthew's theme that the church has much work to do before Jesus returns. It implies that the author's tiny community had only begun what was to be a vast undertaking—a labor extending into the far-distant future.

Summary

In composing a new edition of Jesus' life, Matthew provides his community with a comprehensive survey of Jesus' teaching. The unknown author, who may have lived in Antioch or some other part of Syria in the 80s CE, was a Jewish Christian who used scribal techniques to place Jesus' life and death in the context of ancient Jewish prophecy. Writing to demonstrate that Jesus of Nazareth is the expected Messiah foretold in the Hebrew Bible, Matthew repeatedly quotes or alludes to specific biblical passages that he interprets as being fulfilled in Jesus' career.

The author's concurrent emphasis on scriptural fulfillment and on Jesus' authoritative reinterpretation of the Mosaic Torah (Matt. 5–7) suggests that his work is directed primarily to an audience that sees itself, at least in part, still bound by Torah regulations. Jesus' comments on such matters as Sabbath observance (12:1–14) and divorce (19:3–12) can be seen as examples of Halakah characteristic of first-century Palestinian rabbinic teaching.

By incorporating a large body of teaching material into Mark's narrative framework, Matthew balances Mark's emphasis on Jesus' deeds—miracles

of healing and exorcism—with a counterstress on the ethical content of Jesus' preaching. Instructions to the original disciples (chs. 10 and 18) are applied to conditions in the Christian community of Matthew's day.

Matthew retains the apocalyptic themes found in Mark, but he significantly modifies them. He links the eschatological "kingdom" to missionary activities of the early church, a visible manifestation of divine rule. Matthew's Gospel typically shifts the burden of meaning from speculations about the *eschaton* to necessary activities of the church during the interim between Jesus' resurrection and the Parousia. Thus, Matthew expands Mark's prediction of Jerusalem's destruction to include parables illustrating the duties and obligations of Jesus' "servant," the church (cf. Mark 13 and Matt. 24–25). The shift from eschatological speculation to concern for the indefinitely extended work of the church will be even more evident in Luke-Acts.

By framing Mark's account of Jesus' ministry and Passion with narratives of the Savior's birth and resurrection, Matthew emphasizes the divinely directed, supernatural character of Jesus' life. In Matthew, Jesus becomes the Son of God at conception and is the inheritor of all the ancient promises to Israel. He is the "son" of Abraham, heir to the Davidic throne, successor to the authoritative seat of Moses, and the embodiment of divine Wisdom. A guidebook providing instruction and discipline for the community of faith, Matthew's Gospel became the church's premier source of wise counsel to the faithful.

Questions for Review

1. Even if Mark's Gospel is an older work, what features of Matthew's Gospel can account for its standing first in the New Testament canon? How does Matthew connect his account with the Hebrew Bible?
2. Why do scholars believe it unlikely that one of the Twelve wrote Matthew's Gospel? From the content of the Gospel, what can we infer about its author and the time and place of its composition?
3. In his apparent use of Mark, Q, and other sources unique to his account, how does Matthew reveal some of his special interests and purposes? To underscore his individual themes, what kinds of changes does he make in editing Mark's account?
4. In adding five blocks of teaching material to Mark's framework, how does Matthew emphasize Jesus' role as an interpreter of the Mosaic Torah? How does Matthew present Jesus' teachings as the standard and guide of the Christian community?
5. In what ways does Matthew follow standards of his day in interpreting the Hebrew Bible? How does the author's emphasis on the supernatural affect his portrait of Jesus?
6. Although he emphasizes that Jesus' personal religion is Torah Judaism, Matthew also presents his hero as founder of the church (*ekklesia*). How "Jewish" and Torah abiding did Matthew intend the church to be?
7. In editing and expanding Mark's prophecy of Jerusalem's fall and the *eschaton,* Matthew interpolates several parables of judgment. How do these parables function to stretch the time of the End into the far-distant future?

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. Highlighting Jesus' kingdom message, Matthew devotes long sections to presenting a "kingdom ethic," which involves ending the cycle of retaliation and returning good for evil. If practiced fully today, would Jesus' teaching about giving up all possessions and peacefully submitting to unfair treatment change modern society for the better?

   Can Jesus' policy of turning the other cheek be applied to relations among nations, or does it apply to individual relationships only? Did Jesus intend his ethic for a future ideal time, for dedicated members of the church, or for this imperfect world? Do you think that he expected everyone eventually to follow the principles in the Sermon on the Mount and thus bring about God's rule on earth?
2. With his frequent allusions to Gehenna's fires and a place of "outer darkness" where there is "wailing and grinding of teeth," Matthew makes more references to sinners' punishment in the afterlife than any other Gospel writer. As shown in chapters 10 and 18, he also seems more interested in maintaining church order and exercising control over church members than do

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the other Evangelists. Do you see any connection between these two concerns? Historically, does a religious institution attain greater power if it promotes the belief that it alone offers the means of escaping eternal torment? How large a role does fear of damnation play in eliciting obedience to ecclesiastical authority?

Terms and Concepts to Remember

antitheses
apostle
Beatitudes
Bethlehem
centurion
church
ekklesia
Gehenna
great commission
Haggadah
Halakah
Herod Agrippa I
lex talionis (the law of retaliation)
M (Matthew's special source)
Magi
midrash
Parousia
Peter
saints
scribes and Pharisees
Sermon on the Mount
seven woes
Sheol
Sodom
Valley of Hinnom

Recommended Reading

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———. *The Death of the Messiah,* Vols. 1 and 2. New York: Anchor/Doubleday, 1994. An exhaustive analysis of the Gospel accounts of Jesus' arrest, trial, and execution by a leading Roman Catholic scholar.

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Sim, David. *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism: The History and Social Setting of the Matthean Community*. Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1998. Argues for an exclusively Christian Jewish environment as the Gospel's source.

Stern, David H. *Jewish New Testament Commentary*. Clarksville, Md.: Jewish New Testament Publications, Inc., 1992. An important contribution to recognizing the Jewish cultural context of the early Christian writings.

Talbert, Charles H. *Matthew.* Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2010. Examines the Gospel's cultural environment and the author's theological concerns.

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Wink, Walter. *The Powers That Be: Theology for a New Millennium*. New York: Galilee/Doubleday, 1998. Includes a chapter, "Jesus' Third Way" (between the extremes of violence and passivity), that perceptively interprets Matthew's Sermon on the Mount.

Wright, N. T. *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Christian Origins and the Question of God, Vol. 3). Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2003. Probably the most cogently argued work defending the historicity of Jesus' physical resurrection.

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CHAPTER 9

Luke's Portrait of Jesus

A Savior for "All Nations"

But [Jesus] said, "In the world kings lord it over their subjects; and those in authority are called 'Benefactors.' Not so with you: on the contrary, the highest among you must bear himself like the youngest, the chief of you like a servant. . . . Here I am among you like a servant." Luke 22:25–27

Key Topics/Themes The first part of a two-volume work (Luke-Acts), Luke's Gospel presents Jesus' career not only as history's most crucial event but also as the opening stage of an indefinitely extended historical process that continues in the life of the church (Acts 1–28). Writing for a Greco-Roman audience, Luke emphasizes that Jesus and his disciples, working under the Holy Spirit, are innocent of any crime against Rome and that their religion is a universal faith intended for all people. The parables unique to Luke's Gospel depict the unexpected ways in which God's approaching kingdom overturns the normal social order and reverses conventional beliefs. After a formal preface and extended nativity account (chs. 1 and 2), Luke generally follows Mark's order in narrating the Galilean ministry (chs. 3–9); he then inserts a large body of teaching material, the "greater interpolation" (9:51–18:14), supposedly given on the journey to Jerusalem, returning to Mark for his narration of the Jerusalem ministry and Passion story (18:31–23:56). Luke's final chapter reports post resurrection appearances in or near Jerusalem (ch. 24).

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The author of Luke-Acts is unique among New Testament writers, manifesting a breadth of historical vision comparable to that shown in the sweeping narrative of Israel's history from the conquest of Canaan to the first destruction of the Jewish state (the Hebrew Bible books of Joshua through 2 Kings). Like the final editors of Israel's historical books (sixth century BCE), the writer of Luke-Acts lived at a time when Jerusalem and its Temple lay in ruins and Jews were enslaved to Gentiles. Babylon had demolished Solomon's Temple in 587 BCE, and Rome (labeled the new Babylon in Revelation) had obliterated its successor in 70 CE. In both of these national disasters, the people of Israel lost their sanctuary, priesthood, and homeland. Both catastrophes raised similar questions about God's loyalty to his covenant people. In the bleak decades after 587 BCE, the authors of Psalm 89 and of Lamentations questioned their God's faithfulness to his promises, while the author of Job demanded that Yahweh, the Lord of history, justify his permitting the righteous and innocent to suffer as if they were guilty of unpardonable crimes.

Israel and the Church: Luke's Theology of History

About thirty years before Luke compiled his accounts of Jesus and the early church, Paul had insisted that his fellow Jews were still God's covenant people: "They are Israelites: they were made God's sons; theirs is the splendour of the divine presence, theirs the covenants, the law, the temple worship, and the promises" (Rom. 9:4). Paul was executed several years before the cataclysm of 70 CE; we do not know how he would have interpreted the event to other Jews. Luke, however, who was thoroughly acquainted with God's promises to Israel, attempted to place the Jews' seemingly inexplicable fate in historical and theological perspective. As L. T. Johnson notes in his essay on Luke-Acts (see "Recommended Reading"), Luke's two-volume narrative functions in part as a **theodicy,** a literary work that tries to reconcile beliefs about divine goodness with the irrefutable fact that evil and undeserved suffering permeate human experience.

As he indicates in his formal preface to the Gospel, Luke has pondered long over "the whole course of these events" and is determined to provide "a connected narrative" that will give readers "authentic knowledge" (1:3–4) about the interlocking stories of Judaism and nascent Christianity. Luke's wish to convey "authentic" information (a reliable meaning) through *kathexes* (proper sequential order) in writing his account suggests his moral purpose: Luke-Acts will demonstrate that God did indeed fulfill his promises to Israel before giving his new revelation to the Gentiles. Assured that God has been faithful to Israel, Gentiles can now rely on his promises made through the church, a renewed Israel that includes both Jews and Greeks.

Luke thus begins his double volume—in length Luke-Acts makes up a full third of the New Testament—with a narrative about the conception of John the Baptist. As Luke presents John's nativity, the future baptizer of Jesus is the culminating prophetic figure in Israel's history. The author makes John's parents resemble **Abraham** and **Sarah** in Genesis: Like their biblical prototypes, the Baptist's parents, **Zechariah** and **Elizabeth,** are aged and childless—until an angel appears to announce that the hitherto barren wife will conceive a son destined to be an agent of God's plan for humanity. As the son of Abraham and Sarah—**Isaac**—is the precious "seed" through whom the promised benefits to Israel will flow, so John is the connecting link between Israel's past and the future blessings bestowed by Jesus. John will fill the prophesied role of a returned **Elijah,** messenger of a New Covenant and precursor of Jesus (1:5–21). Because John's father, Zechariah, is a priest who devotedly officiates at the Temple—the location of Zechariah's angelic visitation—the Baptist's heritage is firmly planted at the exact center of Israel's religious tradition.

Midway through his Gospel, Luke makes John's transitional function explicit: "Until John, it was the Law and the prophets; since then there is the good news of the kingdom of God, and everyone forces his way in" (16:16). As the last of Israel's long line of prophets, John represents the First Covenant (Torah and prophets). As the figure who introduces the new era of God's kingdom, John's successor—Jesus of Nazareth—stands at the precise center

The Gospel According to Luke

Author: Traditionally Luke, a traveling companion of Paul, not an eyewitness to Jesus' ministry. Because the writer, who also composed the Book of Acts, rarely shows Paul promoting his distinctive ideas and never mentions Paul's letters, scholars think it unlikely that he was an intimate of the apostle. Luke-Acts is anonymous.

Date: About 85–90 CE, significantly after the destruction of Jerusalem and the church's transformation into a primarily Gentile movement.

Place of composition: Unknown. Suggestions range from Antioch to Ephesus.

Sources: Mark, Q, and special Lukan material (L).

Audience: Gentile Christians dispersed throughout the Roman Empire. The person to whom both Luke and Acts are dedicated, Theophilus, may have been a Greco-Roman government official, or, because his name means "beloved [or lover] of God," he may be a symbol for the Gentile church.

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of time, the pivot on which world history turns. Beginning his ministry with John's baptism, the Lukan Jesus completes it with extensive post resurrection appearances in which he interprets the Hebrew Bible as a christological prophecy, declaring that "everything written about me in the Law of Moses and in the prophets and psalms . . . [is now] fulfilled" (Luke 24:36–53). Jesus then commands his disciples to recruit followers from "all nations," creating a multicultural Gentile community (24:47; Acts 1:8).

In Luke's view, God *has* kept his biblical promises to Israel; the divine advantages that formerly were Israel's exclusive privilege can now be extended to others as well. Accordingly, Luke ends his account of the early church with Paul's declaration that "this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; the Gentiles will *listen*" (Acts 28:28; emphasis added). It is significant that Paul is in Rome, the Gentile center of imperial power, when he asserts that henceforth he and his fellow missionaries will focus their efforts on Gentiles.

After showing Paul preaching "without [legal] restraint" in Rome, Luke abruptly ends his account. He does not continue the story with Paul's execution for sedition or Jerusalem's destruction, twin blows to the church that effectively eliminated both the chief missionary to the Gentiles and the original Jewish nerve center of Christianity. For Luke's purpose, it is enough to imply that Christianity metaphorically has outgrown its Jewish roots and has been transplanted abroad in order to thrive on Gentile soil.

Luke-Acts thus traces the course of a new world religion from its inception in a Bethlehem stable to its (hoped-for) status as a legitimate faith of the Roman Empire. By making Jesus' life the central act of a three-part drama that begins with Israel and continues with the Christian church, Luke offers a philosophy of history vital to Christianity's later understanding of its mission. Instead of bringing the world to an apocalyptic end, Jesus' career is a new beginning that establishes a heightened awareness of God's intentions for all humanity. The Lukan Jesus' triumph over death is closely tied to the disciples' job of evangelizing the world (24:44–53; Acts 1:1–8). In revising Mark's Gospel (Luke's principal source), the author creatively modifies the Markan expectation of an immediate End to show that Jesus' essential work is continued by the believing community. Acts portrays the disciples entering a new historical epoch, the age of the church, and thereby extends the new faith's operations indefinitely into the future. Acts concludes, not by drawing attention to the Parousia, but by recounting Paul's resolve to concentrate on ministering to Gentiles (28:27–28).

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The Author and His Sources

Dedication to Theophilus

Luke addresses his Gospel to **Theophilus,** the otherwise unknown person to whom he also dedicates his sequel, the Book of Acts (1:1; Acts 1:1). Bearing a Greek name meaning "lover of God," Theophilus—whom Luke calls "your Excellency"—may have been a Greek or Roman official, perhaps an affluent patron who underwrote Luke's composition and publication.

Authorship and Date

The most important early reference to the author of Luke-Acts confirms that, like Mark, he was not an eyewitness to the events he narrates. In the Muratorian list of New Testament books (usually dated at about 200 CE, although some recent scholarly studies place it in the fourth century), a note identifies the author of this Gospel as **Luke,** "the beloved" physician who accompanied Paul on some of the apostle's missionary journeys. The note also states that Luke did not know Jesus. In the late second century CE, Irenaeus, a bishop of Lyon in Gaul (modern France), also referred to the author as a companion of Paul's, presumably the same Luke named in several Pauline letters (Col. 4:14; Philem. 24; 2 Tim. 4:11). If the author of Luke-Acts is Paul's friend, it explains the "we" passages in Acts in which the narration changes

from the third to the first person in describing certain episodes; presumably, he was a participant in these events (Acts 16:10–17; 20:5–15; 21:1–18; 27:1–28:16). Some commentators also argue for Lukan authorship on the basis of the writer's vocabulary, which includes a number of medical terms appropriate for a physician. Other scholars, however, point out that the writer uses medical terms no more expertly than he employs legal or maritime terminology.

The author nowhere identifies himself, either in the Gospel or in Acts. His depiction of Paul's character and teaching, moreover, does not always coincide with what Paul reveals of himself in his letters. To many contemporary scholars, these facts indicate that the author could not have known the apostle well. Perhaps the most telling argument against Luke's authorship is that the writer shows no knowledge of Paul's letters. Not only does he never refer to Paul's writing, but he alludes to none of Paul's characteristic teachings in any of the Pauline speeches contained in Acts. At the same time, critics who uphold Lukan authorship point out that the physician associated with Paul for only brief periods and wrote long after Paul's death, when the theological issues argued in Paul's letters were no longer as immediate or controversial as they had been. Luke's concern in Acts is not to reopen theological disputes but to smooth over differences that divided the early church and depict apostles and missionaries united in spreading the faith. Although many experts regard the writer of Luke-Acts as anonymous, others retain the traditional assumption that the historical Luke is the author.

Although the author's identity is not conclusively established, for convenience we refer to him as Luke. Based on his interest in a Gentile audience and his facility with the Greek language (he has the largest vocabulary and most polished style of any Evangelist), the writer may have been a Gentile, perhaps the only non-Jewish biblical writer.

According to most scholars, Luke-Acts was written after 70 CE, when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Roman armies under General (and later, Emperor) Titus. In his version of Jesus' prediction of the holy city's fall (paralleling Mark 13 and Matt. 24), Luke reveals detailed knowledge of the Roman siege:

> But when you see Jerusalem encircled by armies, then you may be sure that her destruction is near. Then you who are in Judea must take to the hills; those that are in the city itself must leave it . . . because this is the time of retribution. . . . For there will be great distress in the land and a terrible judgment upon this people. They will fall at the sword's point; they will be carried captive into all countries; and Jerusalem will be trampled down by foreigners until their day has run its course.
> (21:20–24)

In this passage, Luke substitutes a description of Jerusalem's siege for the cryptic "sign" (the "abomination of desolation") that Mark and Matthew allude to at this point in their accounts (see Mark 13:13–19; Matt. 24:15–22). Luke also refers specifically to the Roman method of encircling a besieged town, a military technique used in the 70 CE assault on Jerusalem:

> Your enemies will set up siege-works against you; they will encircle you and hem you in at every point; they will bring you to the ground, you and your children within your walls, and not leave you one stone standing on another.
> (19:43–44)

It would appear, then, that the Gospel was written at some point after the Jewish War of 66–73 CE and before about 90 CE, when publication made Paul's letters accessible to Christian readers. Many scholars place Luke-Acts in the mid-to-late 80s CE and favor Ephesus, a Greek-speaking city in Asia Minor with a relatively large Christian population, as the place of composition.

Luke's Use of Sources

As a Christian living two or three generations after Jesus' time, Luke must rely on other persons' information, including orally transmitted recollections about Jesus and traditional Christian preaching. Besides using memories of "eyewitnesses" and later missionary accounts, the author depends on his own research skills—the labor he expends going "over the whole course of these events in detail" (1:1–4).

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Luke is aware that "many" others before him produced Gospels (1:1). His resolve to create yet another suggests that he was not satisfied with his predecessors' efforts. As Matthew did, he chooses Mark as his primary source, but he omits several large units of Markan material (such as Mark 6:45–8:26 and 9:41–10:12), perhaps to make room for his own special additions. Adapting Mark to his creative purpose, Luke sometimes rearranges the sequence of individual incidents to emphasize his particular themes. Whereas Mark placed Jesus' rejection at Nazareth midway through the Galilean campaign, Luke sets it at the beginning (4:16–30). Adding that the Nazarenes attempted to kill Jesus to Mark's account, he uses the incident to foreshadow his hero's later death in Jerusalem (see Box 9.1).

In addition, Luke frames Mark's central account of Jesus' adult career with his own unique stories of Jesus' infancy (chs. 1 and 2) and resurrection (ch. 24). Luke further modifies the earlier Gospel by adding two extensive sequences of teaching material to Mark's narrative. The first section inserted into the Markan framework—called the **"lesser interpolation"** (6:20–8:3)—includes Luke's version of the Sermon on the Mount, which the author transfers to level ground. Known as the **Sermon on the Plain** (6:20–49), this collection of Jesus' sayings is apparently drawn from the same source that Matthew used, the hypothetical Q (*Quelle,* "source") document. Instead of assembling Q material into long speeches as Matthew does, however, Luke scatters these sayings throughout his Gospel. Scholars believe that he observes Q's original order more closely than Matthew.

Luke's second major insertion into the Markan narrative, called the **"greater interpolation,"** is nearly ten chapters long (9:51–18:14). A miscellaneous compilation of Jesus' parables and pronouncements, this collection supposedly represents Jesus' teaching on the road from Galilee to Jerusalem. It is composed almost exclusively of Q material and Luke's special source, which scholars call **L (Lukan)**. After this interpolation section, during which all narrative action stops, Luke returns to Mark's account at 18:15 and then reproduces an edited version of the Passion story.

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Like the other Synoptic writers, Luke presents Jesus' life in terms of images and themes from the Hebrew Bible, which thus constitutes another of the author's sources. In Luke's presentation, some of Jesus' miracles, such as his resuscitating a widow's dead son, are told in such a way that they closely resemble similar miracles in the Hebrew Scriptures. Jesus' deeds clearly echo those of the prophets Elijah and Elisha (1 Kings 17–19; 2 Kings 1–6). Luke introduces the Elijah–Elisha theme early in the Gospel (4:23–28), indicating that for him these ancient men of God were prototypes of the Messiah.

Although he shares material from Mark, Q, and the Hebrew Bible with Matthew, Luke gives his "connected narrative" a special quality by including many of Jesus' words that occur only in his Gospel (the L source). Only in Luke do we find such celebrated parables as those of the prodigal son (15:11–32), the lost coin (15:8–10), the persistent widow, the good Samaritan (10:29–32), and Lazarus and the rich man (16:19–31) (see Box 9.2). These and other parables embody consistent themes, typically highlighting life's unexpected reversals and/or God's gracious forgiveness of wrongdoers.

Despite the inclusion of some of Jesus' "hard sayings" about the rigors of discipleship, Luke's special material tends to picture a gentle and loving Jesus, a concerned shepherd who tenderly cares for his flock (the community of believers). Luke has been accused of "sentimentalizing" Jesus' message; however, the author's concern for oppressed people—the poor, social outcasts, women—is genuine and lends his Gospel a distinctively humane and gracious ambience.

Some Typical Lukan Themes

Luke makes his Gospel a distinctive creation by sounding many themes important to the self-identity and purpose of the Christian community for which he writes. Many readers find Luke's account especially appealing because it portrays Jesus taking a personal interest in women, the poor, social outcasts, and other powerless persons. In general, Luke portrays Jesus as a model of compassion who willingly forgives

BOX 9.1 Luke's Editing and Restructuring of Mark

Luke generally follows Mark's narrative sequence, though he uses less of Mark's Gospel (about 35 percent) than Matthew. Besides omitting large sections of Mark (Mark 6:45–8:26 and 9:41–10:12), Luke also typically deletes Markan passages that might reflect unfavorably on Jesus' family or disciples. Consistent with his exaltation of Mary in the birth stories (1:26, 56; 2:1, 39), he omits Mark's story of Jesus' "mother and brothers" trying to interfere in his ministry (Mark 3:21, 33, 34) and rewrites the Markan Jesus' statement about not being respected by his "family and kinsmen" (cf. Mark 6:4; Luke 4:22, 24). Several of Luke's representative changes to his Markan source—apparently made for thematic or theological reasons—are given below.

JESUS' BAPTISM

Mark: It happened at this time that Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized in the Jordan by John. (1:9)

Luke: During a general baptism of the people, when Jesus too had been baptized, heaven opened and the Holy Spirit descended. (Luke 3:21)

[Luke deletes Mark's statement that John baptized Jesus, perhaps to avoid any implication that the Baptist was Jesus' superior.]

JESUS AS SERVANT

Mark: "You know that in the world the recognized rulers lord it over their subjects, and their great men make them feel the weight of authority. That is not the way with you; among you, whoever wants to be great must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be the willing slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give up his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:42–45)

Luke: "In the world, kings lord it over their subjects; and those in authority are called their country's 'Benefactors.' Not so with you: on the contrary, the highest among you must bear himself like the youngest, the chief of you like a servant. For who is greater—the one who sits at table or the servant who waits on him? Surely the one who sits at table. Yet here am I among you like a servant." (Luke 22:25–27)

[Luke changes the setting of Jesus' words from the road to Jerusalem to the scene of the Last Supper and omits the Markan declaration that Jesus' death is a "ransom for many," perhaps suggesting that he viewed Jesus' death as an act of heroic service rather as a sacrifice that "ransoms" humanity. In Acts, where Luke consistently depicts Jesus' followers as imitating his example of service, the author briefly cites Isaiah's "suffering servant" passage (Isa. 53:7–8), but excludes any reference to vicarious atonement (Acts 8:30–35).]

AT THE CROSS

Mark: Then Jesus gave a loud cry and died . . . And when the centurion who was standing opposite him saw how he died, he said, "Truly this man was a son of God." (Mark 15:37, 39)

Luke: Then Jesus gave a loud cry and said, "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit"; and with these words he died. The centurion saw it all, and gave praise to God. "Beyond all doubt," he said, "this man was innocent." (Luke 23:46–47)

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[Instead of perceiving Jesus as worthy of divine honor, as in Mark, the Lukan centurion declares that Jesus is legally innocent of treason against Rome, a theme prominent in Acts' description of the disciples' trials before Roman law courts.]

SEEKING THE RISEN JESUS

Mark: "Nevertheless, after I am raised again I will go on before you into Galilee." (14:28)

Luke: The risen Jesus instructs the disciples: "I am sending upon you my Father's promised gift [the Holy Spirit], so stay here in this city [Jerusalem] until you are armed with the power from above." (24:49)

[At the empty tomb, a youth "wearing a white robe" instructs the frightened women disciples to "give this message to his disciples and Peter: 'He is going on before you into Galilee, and there you will see him, as he told you'" (16:7).]

[Whereas Mark directs the disciples to find their risen Lord in Galilee (as does Matthew 28:7, 10, 16–17), Luke insists that they remain in Jerusalem, where all the Lukan post resurrection appearances take place and where the Holy Spirit anoints the early church (Acts 1:8–2:47).]

BOX 9.2 Representative Examples of Material Found Only in Luke

A formal preface and statement of purpose (1:1–4)
A narrative about the parents of John the Baptist (1:5–25, 57–80)
Luke's distinctive story of Jesus' conception and birth (1:26–56; 2:1–40)
Jesus' childhood visit to the Jerusalem Temple (2:41–52)
A distinctive Lukan genealogy (3:23–38)
The Scripture reading in the Nazareth synagogue and subsequent attempt to kill Jesus (4:16–30)
Jesus' hearing before Herod Antipas (23:6–12)
The sympathetic criminal (23:39–43)
Jesus' post resurrection appearances on the road to Emmaus (24:13–35)
Some parables, sayings, and miracles unique to Luke:
- Raising the son of a Nain widow (7:11–17)
- Two forgiven debtors (7:41–43)

Satan falling like lightning from heaven (10:18)
The good Samaritan (10:29–37)
The rich and foolish materialist (12:13–21)
The unproductive fig tree (13:6–9)
Healing a crippled woman on the Sabbath (13:10–17)
A distinctive version of the kingdom banquet (14:12–24)
The parable of the lost coin (15:8–10)
The prodigal (spendthrift) son (15:11–32)
The dishonest manager (16:1–13)
Lazarus and the rich man (16:19–31)
The Pharisee and the tax collector (18:9–14)

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sinners, comforts the downtrodden, and heals the afflicted. Luke's Jesus is particularly attentive to issues of social and economic justice. In numerous parables unique to his Gospel, Luke demonstrates that Jesus' kingdom ethic demands a radical change in society's present social and religious values. Some major themes that strongly color Luke's portrait of Jesus are described next.

The Holy Spirit Luke is convinced that Jesus' career and the growth of Christianity are not historical accidents, but the direct result of God's will, which is expressed through the Holy Spirit. Luke uses this term more than Mark and Matthew combined (fourteen times). It is by the Spirit that Jesus is conceived and by which he is anointed after baptism. The Spirit leads him into the wilderness (4:1) and empowers his ministry in Galilee (4:14). The Spirit is conferred through prayer (11:13), and at death, the Lukan Jesus commits his "spirit" to God (23:46).

The Holy Spirit reappears with overwhelming power in Acts 2 when, like a "strong driving wind," it rushes upon the 120 disciples gathered in Jerusalem to observe **Pentecost.** Possession by the Spirit confirms God's acceptance of Gentiles into the church (Acts 11:15–18). To Luke, it is the Spirit that is responsible for the faith's rapid expansion throughout the Roman Empire. Like Paul, Luke sees the Christian community as charismatic, Spirit led, and Spirit empowered.

Prayer Another of Luke's principal interests is Jesus' and the disciples' use of prayer. Luke's infancy narrative is full of prayers and hymns of praise by virtually all the adult participants. In his account of John's baptizing campaign, the Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus not at his baptism, as in Mark, but afterward while Jesus is at prayer (3:21). Similarly, Jesus chooses the disciples after prayer (6:12) and prays before he asks them who he is (9:18). The Transfiguration occurs "while he is praying" (9:29). Jesus' instructions on prayer are also more extensive than in other Gospels (11:1–13; 18:1–14). The Lukan emphasis on prayer carries over into Acts, in which the heroes of the early church are frequently shown praying (Acts 1:14, 24–26; 8:15; 10:1–16).

Jesus' Concern for Women From the beginning of his account, Luke makes it clear that women play an indispensable part in fulfilling the divine plan. Elizabeth, Zechariah's wife, is chosen to produce and raise Israel's final prophet, the one who prepares the way for Jesus. Her cousin

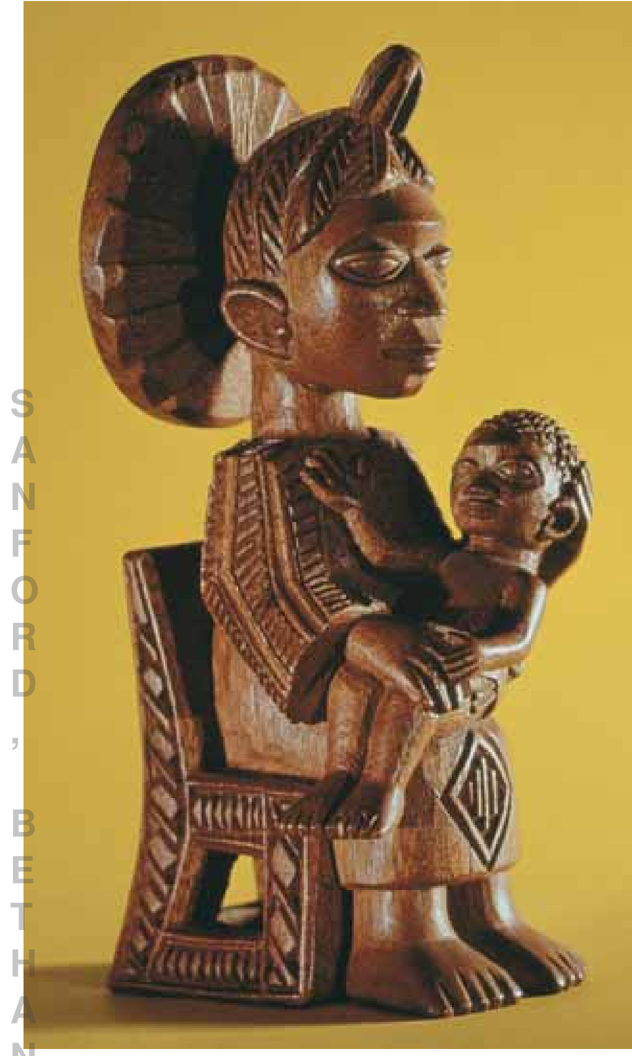

FIGURE 9.1 *Virgin and Child.* This wooden sculpture from Africa shows the infant Jesus with Mary, a rendition illustrating the archetypal image of mother and child, nurturer and bearer of new life, as well as an image of black holiness.

Mary responds affirmatively to the Holy Spirit, conceiving and nurturing the world-savior (see Figure 9.1). During his adult ministry, Jesus accepts many female disciples, praising those who, like **Mary,** the sister of **Martha,** abandon domestic chores to take their places among the male followers—a privilege Jesus declares "will not be taken from [them]" (10:38–42) (see Figure 9.2). Galilean women not only follow Jesus on the path to Jerusalem but also financially support him and his male companions (8:2–3).

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FIGURE 9.2 *The Holy Family.* The unknown years of Jesus' boyhood are given a Japanese setting in this twentieth-century painting on silk. Shouldering his share of the family's work, the young Jesus carries wood to help Joseph, his carpenter father, while Mary, his mother, is busy at her spinning wheel. The themes of productive labor, mutual assistance, and familial harmony dominate the domestic scene in Nazareth, providing a contrast to the adult Jesus' later rejection of family ties and obligations (Mark 3).

As in Mark, it is these Galilean women who provide the human link between Jesus' death and resurrection, witnessing the Crucifixion and receiving first the news that he is risen (23:49; 23:55–24:11).

Jesus' Affinity with the Unrespectable Closely linked to Jesus' concern for women, who were largely powerless in both Jewish and Greco-Roman society, is his affinity for many similarly vulnerable people on the margins of society. "A friend of tax-gatherers and sinners" (7:34), the Lukan Jesus openly accepts social outcasts, including "immoral" women, such as an apparently notorious woman who crashes a Pharisee's dinner party and seats herself next to Jesus, bathing his feet with her tears, much to his host's indignation (7:37–50). Luke alone preserves one of Jesus' most provocative stories, in which the central character is an ungrateful son who consorts with prostitutes and sinks to groveling with swine—but whom his father loves unconditionally (15:11–32). In Luke, Jesus not only conducts a brief ministry in **Samaria** (traditionally viewed as a center of religious impurity [9:52–56]) but also makes a **Samaritan** the embodiment of neighborly love (10:30–37).

Accused of being "a glutton and a drinker," Jesus personally welcomes "tax-gatherers and other bad characters" to dine with him, refusing

to distinguish between deserving and undeserving guests (7:29–34; 15:1–2). In Luke's version of the great banquet, the host's doors are thrown open indiscriminately to "the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind," people incapable of reciprocating hospitality (14:12–24). To Luke, it is not the "poor in spirit" who gain divine blessing, but simply "the poor," the economically deprived for whom productive citizens typically show little sympathy (cf. 6:20–21 and 6:24–25).

Christianity as a Universal Faith The author designs Luke-Acts to show that, through Jesus and his successors, God directs human history to achieve humanity's redemption. Luke's theory of salvation history has a universalist aspect: From its inception, Christianity is a religion intended for "all nations," especially those peoples who have hitherto lived without Israel's Law and prophets. As **Simeon** prophesies over the infant Jesus, the child is destined to become "a revelation to the heathen [Gentiles]" (2:32). Luke's emphasis on Jesus' universality also appears in his genealogy, which, like that in Matthew, traces Jesus' descent through Joseph (Luke 3:23). Unlike Matthew, however, who lists Jesus' ancestors back to Abraham, "father of the Jews," Luke takes Jesus' family tree all the way back to the first human, Adam, whom he calls "son of God" (Luke 3:23–38). By linking Jesus with Adam, the one created in God's "image" and "likeness," Luke presents Jesus as savior of the whole human race. Whereas Matthew emphasizes Jesus' heritage as Jewish Messiah, Luke shows him as the heir of Adam, from whom all of humanity is descended. In Acts, therefore, the risen Christ's final words commission his followers to bear witness about him from Jerusalem "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8), conveying his message to all of Adam's children.

Christianity as a Lawful Religion Besides presenting Christianity as a universal faith, Luke works to show that it is a peaceful and lawful religion. Both the Gospel and its sequel, the Book of Acts, function as an **apology** (*apologia*), a form of literature written to defend or explain a particular viewpoint or way of life. In reporting Jesus' trial before the Roman magistrate and Paul's similar hearings before various other Roman officials, Luke is careful to mention that in each case the accused is innocent of any real crime. Although Pilate condemns Jesus for claiming to be "king of the Jews," an act of sedition against Rome, in Luke's Gospel, Pilate also affirms Jesus' innocence, explicitly stating that he finds the prisoner "guilty of no capital offence" (23:22). In Acts, Luke creates parallels to Jesus' trial in which the apostles and others are similarly declared innocent of subversion. Convinced that Christianity is destined to spread throughout the empire, Luke wishes to demonstrate that it is no threat to the peace or stability of the Roman government.

The Importance of Jerusalem More than any other Gospel author, Luke links crucial events in Jesus' life with Jerusalem and the Temple. He is the only Evangelist to associate Jesus' infancy and childhood with visits to the Temple and the only one to place *all* of Jesus' post resurrection appearances in or near Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the place where his Gospel account begins (1:8–22), where Jesus' parents take their eight-day-old son for circumcision (2:31–39), and where the twelve-year-old Jesus astonishes "teachers" in the Temple with the profundity of his questions (2:41–51).

Near the conclusion of his ministry, the adult Jesus "set his face to go to Jerusalem," the city where he would endure a fatal confrontation with priestly and Roman authorities (9:51). As the Lukan Jesus insists, "It is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem"—a statement that occurs only in Luke (13:33).

In Mark, the youth at Jesus' empty tomb directs the bewildered female disciples to seek their risen Lord "in Galilee" (Mark 16:7), an order that Matthew says the male disciples eventually obeyed (Matt. 28:16–20). In contrast, the Lukan Jesus commands his followers to remain in Jerusalem (24:49), where they will receive the Holy Spirit. Luke's insistence that Jerusalem and its environs—not Galilee—were the sites of all Jesus' appearances after his resurrection expresses his view that Jerusalem and the Temple were central to God's plan. For Luke, not only is Jerusalem the place where Jesus dies, is buried,

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BOX 9.3 New Characters Introduced in Luke

Elizabeth and the priest Zechariah, parents of the Baptist (1:5–25, 39–79)
Gabriel, the angel who announces Jesus' virginal conception (1:26–38)
Augustus, emperor of Rome (2:1–2)
Simeon, who foretells Jesus' messiahship (2:25–35)
Anna, an aged prophetess (2:36–38)
The widow of Nain (7:11–16)
The unidentified sinful woman whom Jesus forgives (7:36–50)
The sisters Mary and Martha (10:38–39)
Zacchaeus, the wealthy tax collector (19:1–10)
Herod Antipas, as one of Jesus' judges (22:7–12; also 9:7–9)
Cleopas and an unidentified disciple (24:13–35)

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rises from the tomb, appears to his followers, and ascends to heaven, it is also the sacred ground on which the Christian church is founded. In Luke's theology of history, God thus fulfills his ancient promises to Israel, focusing his divine power on the holy city where King David once reigned and where David's ultimate heir inaugurates an everlasting kingdom.

Jesus as Savior Finally, Luke also presents Jesus in a guise that his Greek and Roman readers will understand. Matthew had labored to prove from the Hebrew Bible that Jesus was the Davidic Messiah. In the account of Jesus' infancy, Luke also sounds the theme of prophetic fulfillment. But he is aware as well that his Gentile audience is not primarily interested in a Jewish Messiah, a figure traditionally associated with Jewish nationalism. Although Mark and Matthew had declared their hero "Son of God," Luke further universalizes Jesus' appeal by declaring him "Savior" (1:69; 2:11; Acts 3:13–15). He is the only Synoptic writer to do so. Luke's term (the Greek *sōter*) was used widely in the Greco-Roman world and was applied to gods, demigods, and human rulers alike. Hellenistic peoples commonly worshiped savior deities in numerous mystery cults and hailed emperors by the title "god and savior" for the material benefits, such as health, peace, and prosperity, that they conferred (see the discussion of the emperor cult in Chapter 5). For Luke, Jesus is the **Savior** of repentant humanity, one who delivers believers from the consequences of sin, as the judges of ancient Israel "saved" or delivered their people from military oppressors. (The NEB translators therefore use the English noun *deliverer* for *sōter* in Luke [1:24, 69; 2:11].)

Organization of Luke's Gospel

A simple outline of Luke's structure follows:

1. Formal preface (1:1–4)
2. Infancy narratives of the Baptist and Jesus (1:5–2:52)
3. Prelude to Jesus' ministry: baptism, genealogy, and temptation (3:1–4:13)
4. Jesus' Galilean ministry (4:14–9:50)
5. Luke's travel narrative: Jesus' teachings on the journey to Jerusalem (the "greater interpolation" [9:51–18:14])
6. The Jerusalem ministry: Jesus' challenge to the holy city (18:31–21:38)
7. The final conflict and Passion story (22:1–23:56)
8. Epilogue: post resurrection appearances in the vicinity of Jerusalem (24:1–53)

In examining Luke's work, we focus primarily on material found only in his Gospel, especially the narrative sections and parables that illustrate distinctively Lukan themes (see Box 9.3 for new characters introduced in Luke). Because we have already discussed the preface, we begin with one of the most familiar and best-loved stories in the entire Bible—the account of Jesus' conception and birth.

Infancy Narratives of the Baptist and Jesus

We do not know Luke's source for his infancy narratives (1:5–2:52), but he apparently drew on a tradition that differed in many details from Matthew's account. The two writers agree that Jesus was born in Bethlehem to **Mary,** a virgin, and **Joseph,** a descendant of David (see Figure 9.3). Apart from that, however, the two Evangelists relate events in strikingly different manners.

In composing his parallel infancy narratives, Luke adopts a consciously biblical style, writing in the old-fashioned Greek of the Septuagint Bible. The effect is akin to that of reading the birth stories in the archaic language of the King James Version and most of the rest of the Gospel in more contemporary English. Luke's purpose here, however, is more than merely stylistic: He is echoing the ancient Scriptures, both by his style and by extensive quotations from the Hebrew prophets, because what he relates in these passages is the climactic turn of history: "Until John, it was the Law and the prophets, since then there is the good news of the kingdom" (16:16). Whereas the Baptist will serve as the capstone of Israel's ancient prophetic tradition, in Jesus, God will both fulfill his promises to Israel and begin the climactic process of human salvation.

FIGURE 9.3 *Our Lady of Colombia.* In this conception of Mary and the infant Jesus, the artist pictures the Madonna as an archetypal image of abundance and fertility, giving her a crown to depict her queenly status and surrounding her with flowers to suggest her association with natural fecundity. This twentieth-century rendition of the Virgin by F. Botero of Colombia effectively demonstrates her thematic connection with nurturing goddesses of pre-Christian antiquity.

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The Birth of John the Baptist

In depicting John's aged parents, Elizabeth and Zechariah, Luke highlights their exemplary piety and devotion to the letter of Israel's religion. Described as "upright and devout, blamelessly observing all the commandments and ordinances of the [Torah]" (1:6), Zechariah and Elizabeth represent the best in Judaism.

Luke is the only New Testament writer to state that the respective mothers of John and Jesus are blood relatives (1:36). The later adult association between John and Jesus is thus foreshadowed by their physical kinship, their mothers' friendship, and the similar circumstances of their births.

The Role of Mary

Luke interweaves the two nativity accounts, juxtaposing **Gabriel**'s visit to Mary (1:26–38) (the **Annunciation**) with Mary's visit to her cousin Elizabeth, a meeting that causes the unborn John to stir in his mother's womb at the approach of the newly conceived Jesus. As Mary had been made pregnant by the Holy Spirit, so Elizabeth at their encounter is empowered by the Spirit to prophesy concerning the superiority of Mary's child. This emphasis on women's role in the divine purpose (note also the prophetess Anna in 2:36–38) is a typical Lukan concern. Also significant is Luke's hint about Mary's family background. Because Elizabeth is "of priestly descent," which means that she belongs to the tribe of Levi, it seems probable that Mary also belongs to the Levitical clan rather than the Davidic tribe of Judah. Like that of Matthew, Luke's genealogy traces Jesus' Davidic ancestry through Joseph (1:5; 3:23–24).

In relating the two infancy stories, Luke subtly indicates the relative importance of the two children. He dates John's birth in King Herod's reign (1:5). In contrast, when introducing Jesus' nativity, the author relates the event not to a Judean king, but to a Roman emperor, Augustus Caesar (2:1). Luke thus places Jesus in a worldwide (as opposed to a local Jewish) context, suggesting both the universal scope of Jesus' significance and the babe's ultimate destiny to rule all humanity.

For Luke, Jesus' humble arrival on earth shows that God is henceforth actively intervening in Roman society. A Lukan angel proclaims "good news" that contrasts markedly with Rome's imperial propaganda. Although Augustus, divine "son" of the deified Caesar, reigned "throughout the Roman world," the real "deliverer [savior]" is the infant lying "in a manger" (2:1–14). (For a discussion of the Roman emperor cult, see Chapter 5.)

In telling of Jesus' circumcision and Mary's ritual purification (2:21–24), Luke emphasizes another theme important to his picture of Jesus' Jewish background: Not only relatives like Elizabeth and Zechariah but also Jesus' immediate family observe the Mosaic Law scrupulously. His parents obey every Torah command (2:39), including making a yearly pilgrimage to the Jerusalem Temple for Passover (2:41–43). The author's own view is that most of the Torah's provisions no longer bind Christians (Acts 15), but he wishes to emphasize that from birth Jesus fulfilled all Torah requirements.

Luke's Use of Hymns

Throughout the infancy stories of Jesus and the Baptist, Luke follows the Greco-Roman biographer's practice of inserting speeches that illustrate themes vital to the writer's view of his subject. The long poem uttered by Zechariah—known by its Latin name, the **Benedictus** (1:67–79)—combines scriptural quotations with typically Lukan views about Jesus' significance. The same is true of the priest Simeon's prayer, the **Nunc Dimittis** (2:29–32), and ensuing prophecy (2:23–25). Some of the speeches ascribed to characters in the nativity accounts may be rewritten songs and prayers first used in Christian worship services. These liturgical pieces include the angel Gabriel's announcement to Mary that she will bear a son, the Ave Maria (1:28–33), and Mary's exulting prayer, the **Magnificat** (1:46–55). Mary's hymn closely resembles a passage from the Hebrew Bible, the prayer Hannah recites when an angel

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foretells the birth of her son, Samuel (1 Sam. 2:1–10). In its present form, this hymn may be as much a composition of the early church, conceived as an appropriate biblical response to the angel's visit, as a memory of Mary's literal words. Nonetheless, Luke implies that Jesus' mother may have been a source of this tradition, noting that she reflected deeply on the unusual circumstances surrounding her son's birth (2:19; see also 2:51).

Luke includes the only tradition about Jesus' boyhood contained in the New Testament, an anecdote about the twelve-year-old boy's visit to the Temple in which he impresses some learned scribes with the acuteness of his questions and understanding (2:41–52). The statement that Jesus "advanced in wisdom and in favor with God and men" (2:52) almost exactly reproduces the Old Testament description of young Samuel (1 Sam. 2:26) and is probably a conventional observation rather than a historically precise evaluation of Jesus' youthful character. For Luke, this Temple episode serves primarily to anticipate Jesus' later ministry at the Jerusalem sanctuary.

Jesus' Galilean Ministry

Jesus' Rejection in Nazareth

After describing John's baptism campaign and Jesus' temptation by Satan (3–4:13), Luke introduces Jesus' public career in a way that significantly revises Mark's order of events. Whereas Matthew closely follows Mark in placing Jesus' rejection in Nazareth after the Galilean campaign is already well under way (cf. Mark 6:1–6; Matt. 13:53–58), Luke transfers this episode almost to the beginning of Jesus' ministry (4:16–30). The Evangelist makes this change in his source not to provide a more factually accurate biography, but probably for the same reason that the author of John's Gospel switches his account of Jesus' assault on the Temple from the time of Jesus' final entry into Jerusalem (as all three Synoptics have it) to the beginning of his career: He wants his readers to understand the event's thematic or theological meaning. (See Chapter 10 for a discussion of John's probable motives in repositioning the Temple incident.)

In this highly dramatic scene of conflict between Jesus and the residents of his hometown, Luke extensively rewrites Mark's account. Besides eliminating Mark's implication that Jesus' family failed to recognize his worth and inserting a quotation from Isaiah that expresses Luke's view of Jesus' prophetic role, the author creates a speech for Jesus that outrages the people of Nazareth. Taking full authorial advantage of his first opportunity to show the adult Jesus interacting with his contemporaries, Luke uses the occasion of Jesus' visit to the Nazareth synagogue to give readers a thematic preview of his entire two-volume work. By adding that Jesus' former neighbors try to kill him (an element absent in Mark and Matthew, who merely report that Nazareth's residents showed him little respect), Luke foreshadows Jesus' later rejection and death in Jerusalem. By having Jesus deliver a sermon in which two of Israel's greatest prophets, Elijah and Elisha, perform their most spectacular miracles to benefit Gentiles, not native Israelites, Luke anticipates the church's future mission to Gentile nations, developments he will narrate in the Book of Acts.

Even more important to Luke is his vision of Jesus' essential calling, which he evokes in the quotation from Isaiah: Jesus is empowered by the same divine Spirit that motivated Israel's prophets, and he will pursue the same kind of work they did, offering aid and comfort to people suffering the harsh realities of economic and political oppression, explicitly "the poor" and downtrodden. Restoring vision to persons metaphorically imprisoned or blind and helping "broken victims go free," Jesus proclaims God's favor to those whom society typically ignores or exploits. Characteristically, Luke omits Isaiah's reference to divine "vengeance" (Isa. 61:1–2; 58:6). Luke's implicit critique of the Roman status quo, then, includes neither the threat of armed rebellion nor a promise of divine retribution.

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Luke's Version of Jesus' Teaching

For the next two chapters (4:31–6:11), Luke reproduces much of the Markan narrative dealing with Jesus' miracles of healing and exorcism. Despite violent opposition in Nazareth, Jesus draws large crowds, healing many and preaching in numerous Galilean synagogues. Luke transposes the Markan order, however, placing Jesus' calling of the Twelve after the Nazareth episode (6:12–19). This transposition serves as an introduction to Jesus' first public discourse, the Sermon on the Plain (6:20–49). The Sermon begins a long section (called the "lesser interpolation") in which the author interweaves material shared with Matthew (presumably from Q) with material that appears only in his own Gospel (6:20–8:3).

Luke's Sermon on the Plain Resembling an abbreviated version of Matthew's Sermon on the Mount (see Box 9.4 and Figure 9.4), the Lukan discourse begins with briefer forms of four Beatitudes, all of which are in the second person and hence directed at "you" (the audience/reader). Matthew had phrased the Beatitudes in the third person ("they") and presented them as blessings on people who possessed the right spiritual nature, such as "those who hunger and thirst to see right prevail" (Matt. 5:6). In contrast, Luke "materializes" the Beatitudes, bluntly referring to physical hunger: "How blest are you who now go hungry; your hunger shall be satisfied" (6:21). His "poor" are the financially destitute, the powerless who are to receive the "kingdom of God."

Luke follows the Beatitudes with a list of "woes" ("alas for you") in which the "rich" and "well-fed" are cursed with future loss and hunger. Persons happy with the present Roman social order are destined to regret their former complacency (6:24–26). This harsh judgment on people whom society generally considers fortunate occurs only in Luke and represents one of Luke's special convictions: The kingdom will bring a radical reversal of presently accepted values and expectations. The author does not specify his objections to the wealthy as a class, but in material exclusive to his Gospel, he repeatedly attacks the rich, predicting that their present affluence and luxury will be exchanged for misery.

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Reversals of Status for Rich and Poor In pleading the cause of the poor against the rich, Luke also includes his special rendering of Jesus' command to love one's enemies (6:32–36; cf. Matt. 5:43–48). One must practice giving unselfishly because such behavior reflects the nature and purpose of God, who treats even the wicked with kindness (6:32–36). As the Lukan parables typically illustrate unexpected reversals of status between the rich and poor, so do they teach generosity and compassion—qualities that to Luke are literally divine (6:35–36).

To Luke, Jesus provides the model of compassionate behavior. When Christ raises a widow's son from the dead (7:11–17), the miracle expresses the twin Lukan themes of God's special love for the poor and unfortunate (especially women) and Jesus' role as Lord of the resurrection. (Luke imparts a particularly awe-inspiring quality to this scene, highlighting Jesus' empathy for the grieving mother.) By including this episode (unique to his Gospel), the author reminds his readers of the joy they will experience when Jesus appears again to restore life to all.

The Importance of Women Luke commonly uses Jesus' interaction with women to reveal his concept of Jesus' character, emphasizing his hero's combination of authority and tenderness. After providing ultimate comfort to the grieving widow at Nain, Jesus reveals similar compassion for a prostitute, to whom he imparts another form of new life. All four Gospels contain an incident in which a woman anoints Jesus with oil or some other costly ointment (Mark 14:3–9; Matt. 26:6–13; John 12:1–8). In Luke (7:36–50), however, the anointing does not anticipate preparation for Jesus' burial, as it does in the other Gospels, but is an act of intense love on the unnamed woman's part. Set in the house of a Pharisee where Jesus is dining, the Lukan

BOX 9.4 Comparison of the Beatitudes in Matthew and Luke

MATTHEW

How blest are these who know their
need of God [the "poor in spirit"];
the kingdom of Heaven is theirs.
How blest are those of a gentle spirit;
they shall have the earth for
their possession.
How blest are those who hunger and
thirst to see right prevail;
they shall be satisfied.
How blest are those who show mercy;
mercy shall be shown to them.
How blest are those whose hearts
are pure;
they shall see God.
How blest are the peacemakers;
God shall call them his [children].
How blest are those who have suffered
persecution for the cause of right;
the kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

How blest you are, when you suffer insults and persecution and every kind of calumny for my sake. Accept it with gladness and exultation, for you have a rich reward in heaven; in the same way they persecuted the prophets before you. (Matt. 5:3–12)

LUKE

How blest are you who are in need ["you poor"];
the kingdom of God is yours.

How blest are you who now go hungry;
your hunger shall be satisfied.

How blest you are when men hate you, when they outlaw you and insult you, and ban your very name as infamous, because of the Son of Man. On that day be glad and dance for joy; for assuredly you have a rich reward in heaven; in just the same way did their fathers treat the prophets.

[The "Woes"]

But alas for you who are rich; you have had your
time of happiness.
Alas for you who are well-fed now; you shall go
hungry.
Alas for you who laugh now; you shall mourn and
weep.
Alas for you when all speak well of you; just so
did their fathers treat the false prophets.
(Luke 6:20–26)

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version focuses on the woman's overwhelming emotion and on the typically Lukan theme of compassion and forgiveness. To Luke, the "immoral" woman's love proves that "her many sins have been forgiven."

In John, the woman is identified as Mary, sister of Martha and Lazarus, but there is no hint of her possessing a lurid past. It would appear that Jesus' emotional encounter with a woman who lavished expensive unguents upon him impressed onlookers enough to remember and transmit it orally to the early Christian community, but—as in the case of many other of Jesus' actions and sayings—the precise context of the event was forgotten. Each Gospel writer provides his own explanatory frame for the incident (cf. Luke 7:36–50; Mark 14:3–9; Matt. 26:6–13; John 12:1–8).

Fittingly, the first extensive interpolation of Lukan material concludes with a summary of the

FIGURE 9.4 Traditional site of the Sermon on the Mount. According to tradition, it was on this hill overlooking the Sea of Galilee that Jesus delivered his most famous discourse, the teachings compiled in Matthew 5–7. The Gospel of Luke, however, states that Jesus spoke to his Galilean audience on "level ground" (Luke 6:17).

part women play in Jesus' ministry. Accompanying him are numerous female disciples, Galilean women whom he had healed and who now support him and the male disciples "out of their own resources" (8:1–3).

Luke's Travel Narrative: Jesus' Teachings on the Journey to Jerusalem

Luke begins this long section (9:51–18:14) with Jesus' firm resolution to head toward Jerusalem, a distance of about sixty miles, and the final conflict that will culminate in his death and resurrection. Although ostensibly the record of a journey from Galilee to Judea, this part of the Gospel (traditionally known as the "greater interpolation") contains little action or sense of forward movement. Emphasizing Jesus' teaching, it is largely a miscellaneous collection of brief anecdotes, sayings, and parables. Here the author intermixes Q material with that of his individual source (L), including most of the parables unique to his Gospel.

At the beginning of this section, Luke records two incidents that preview later developments in Acts. On his way south to Jerusalem, Jesus passes through Samaria, carrying his message to several villages. In Matthew (10:5–6), Jesus expressly forbids a mission to the Samaritans, bitterly hated by Jews for their interpretation of the Mosaic Law. Luke, however, shows Jesus forbidding the disciples to punish

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an inhospitable Samaritan town and conducting a short campaign there (9:52–56).

Along with the celebrated story of the "good Samaritan," this episode anticipates the later Christian mission to Samaria described in Acts 8. Jesus' sending forth seventy-two disciples to evangelize the countryside (10:1–16) similarly prefigures the future recruiting of Gentiles. In Jewish terminology, the number seventy or seventy-two represented the sum total of non-Jewish nations. As the Twelve sent to proselytize Israel probably symbolize the traditional twelve Israelite tribes (9:1–6), so the activity of the seventy-two foreshadows Christian expansion among Gentiles of the Roman Empire.

Luke's Jesus experiences a moment of ecstatic triumph when the seventy-two return from conducting a series of successful exorcisms. Possessed by the Spirit, he perceives the reality behind his disciples' victory over evil. In a mystical vision, Jesus sees Satan, like a bolt of lightning, hurled from heaven. Through the disciples' actions, Satan's influence is in decline (although he returns to corrupt Judas in 22:23).

In this context of defeating evil through good works, Jesus thanks God that his uneducated followers understand God's purpose better than the intellectual elite. In this passage, Luke expresses ideas that are more common in John's Gospel: Only Christ knows the divine nature, and only he can reveal it to those whom he chooses (10:17–24; cf. Matthew's version of this prayer in Matt. 11:25–27).

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

Luke is aware, however, that "the learned and wise" are not always incapable of religious insight. In 10:25–28, a Torah expert defines the essence of the Mosaic Law in the twin commands to love God (Deut. 6:5) and neighbor (Lev. 19:18). Confirming the expert's perception, Jesus replies that, in loving thus, the man "will live." In this episode, Luke provides a good example of the way in which he adapts Markan material to his theological purpose. Mark places this dialogue with the Torah instructor in the Jerusalem Temple and emphasizes Jesus' approval of the speaker's view that the "law of love" is the epitome of Judaism (Mark 12:28–31). Luke changes the site of this encounter from the Temple to an unidentified place on the road to Jerusalem and uses it to introduce his parable of the good Samaritan. The author creates a transition to the parable by having the instructor ask Jesus to explain what the Torah means by "neighbor."

Instead of answering directly, Jesus responds in typical rabbinic fashion: He tells a story. The questioner must discover his neighbor's identity in Jesus' depiction of a specific human situation. In analyzing the tale of the good Samaritan (10:29–35), most students will find that it not only follows Luke's customary theme of the unexpected but also introduces several rather thorny problems.

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Ethical Complexities Jesus' original audience would have seen enormous ethical complexities in this parable. The priest and **Levite** face a real dilemma: When they find the robbers' victim, they do not know whether the man is alive or dead. If they so much as touch a corpse, the Torah declares them ritually unclean, and they will be unable to fulfill their Temple duties. In this case, keeping the Law means ignoring the claim of a person in need. The priest's decision to remain faithful to Torah requirements necessitates his failure to help.

By making a Samaritan the moral hero of his story, Jesus further complicates the issue. In Jewish eyes, the Samaritans, who claimed guardianship of the Mosaic Law, were corrupters of the Torah from whom nothing good could be expected. (Note that a Samaritan village had refused Jesus hospitality because he was making a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, site of the Temple cult that the Samaritans despised [9:52–56].) Finally, Jesus' tale underscores a typical Lukan reversal: The religious outsider, whom the righteous hold in contempt, is the person who obeys the Torah's essential meaning—to act as God's agent by giving help to persons in need.

When Jesus asks the Torah expert which person in the tale behaves as a neighbor, the

expert apparently cannot bring himself to utter the hated term *Samaritan.* Instead, he vaguely identifies the hero as "the one who showed [the victim] kindness." Jesus' directive to behave as the Samaritan does—in contrast to the priest and the Levite—contains a distinctly subversive element. When the Samaritan helps a Jew (the victim had been traveling from Jerusalem), he boldly overlooks ethnic and sectarian differences in order to aid a religious "enemy."

By constructing this particular scenario, Jesus forces the Torah instructor (and Luke, his reader) to recognize that a "neighbor" does not necessarily belong to one's own racial or religious group but can be any person who demonstrates generosity and human kindness. (From the orthodox view, the Samaritan belongs to a "false" religion; he is not only a foreigner but a "heretic" as well.) An even more subversive note is sounded when the parable implies that the priest's and Levite's faithful adherence to biblical rules is the barrier that prevents them from observing religion's essential component, which the Torah expert had correctly defined as the love of God and neighbor.

Mary and Martha

Luke follows the Samaritan parable with a brief anecdote about Jesus' visit at the house of two sisters, Mary and Martha (10:38–42). In its own way, this episode draws a similar distinction between strict adherence to duty and a sensitivity to "higher" opportunities. The Lukan Jesus commends Mary for abandoning her traditional woman's role and joining the men to hear his teaching. The learning experience will be hers to possess forever.

Instructions on Prayer

Luke places a greater emphasis on prayer than any other Synoptic author. Although his version of the Lord's Prayer is much shorter than Matthew's, he heightens its significance by adding several parables that extol the value of persistence. Petitioning God is implicitly compared to pestering a friend until he grants what is asked (11:5–10). The same theme reappears in the parable of the importunate or "pushy" widow (18:1–8) who seeks justice from a cynical and corrupt judge. An unworthy representative of his profession, the judge cares nothing about God or public opinion—but he finally grants the widow's petition because she refuses to give him any peace until he acts. If even an unresponsive friend and unscrupulous judge can be hounded into helping someone, how much more is God likely to reward people who do not give up talking to him (18:7–8)?

Luke contrasts two different kinds of prayers in his parable of the Pharisee and a **"publican"** (officially licensed tax-gatherer for Rome) (18:9–14). In Jesus' day, the term *tax-gatherer* was a synonym for *sinner,* one who betrayed his Jewish countrymen by hiring himself out to the Romans and making a living by extorting money and goods from an already-oppressed people. The parable contrasts the Pharisee's consciousness of religious worth with the tax collector's confession of his failings. In Luke's reversal of ordinary expectations, it is the honest outcast—not necessarily the conventionally good person—who wins God's approval.

Luke's Views on Riches and Poverty

More than any other Gospel writer, Luke emphasizes forsaking worldly ambition for the spiritual riches of the kingdom. The Lukan Jesus assures his followers that, if God provides for nature's birds and flowers, he will care for Christians. He urges his disciples to sell their possessions, give to the poor, and thus earn "heavenly treasures" (12:22–34).

Luke's strong antimaterialism and apparent bias against the rich is partly the result of his conviction that God's judgment may occur at any time. The rich fool dies before he can enjoy his life's work (12:13–21), but Christians may face judgment even before death. The Master may return without warning at any time (12:35–40). Rather than accumulating wealth, believers must share with the poor and with social outcasts

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(14:12–14). Luke also emphasizes that the deformed and unattractive, rejects and have-nots of society, must be the Christian's primary concern in attaining Jesus' favorable verdict (14:15–24).

Lazarus and the Rich Man

Reversals in the Afterlife The Lukan Jesus makes absolute demands upon his disciples: None can belong to him without giving away everything he owns (14:33). In his parable of Lazarus and the rich man, Luke dramatizes the danger of hanging onto great wealth until death parts the owner from his possessions (16:19–31). Appearing only in Luke's Gospel, this metaphor of the afterlife embodies typically Lukan concepts. It shows a rich man experiencing all the posthumous misery that Jesus had predicted for the world's comfortable and satisfied people (6:24–26) and a poor beggar enjoying all the rewards that Jesus had promised to the hungry and outcast (6:20–21). Demonstrating Luke's usual theme of reversal, the parable shows the two men exchanging their relative positions in the next world.

In recounting Jesus' only parable that deals with the contrasting fates of individuals after death, Luke employs ideas typical of first-century Hellenistic Judaism. The author's picture of Lazarus in paradise and the rich man in fiery torment is duplicated in Josephus's contemporary description of Hades (the Underworld).

Significantly, Luke charges the rich man with no crime and assigns the beggar no virtue. To the author, current social conditions—the existence of hopeless poverty and sickness alongside the "magnificence" and luxury of the affluent—apparently will undergo a radical change when God rules the world completely. The only fault of which the rich man is implicitly guilty is his toleration of the extreme contrast between his own abundance and the miserable state of the poor. For Luke, it seems to be enough. The author's ideal social order is the commune that the disciples establish following Pentecost, an economic arrangement in which the well-to-do sell their possessions, share them with the poor, and hold "everything in common" (Acts 2:42–47).

Luke modifies his severe criticism of great wealth, however, by including Mark's story of Jesus' advice to a rich man. (He returns to the Markan narrative again in 18:15.) If wealth disqualifies one from the kingdom, who can hope to please God? Jesus' enigmatic reply—all things are possible with God (18:18–27)—leads to the concept of divine compensation. Persons who sacrifice family or home to seek the kingdom will be repaid both now (presumably referring to the spiritual riches they enjoy in church fellowship) and in the future with eternal life (18:28–30).

Jesus' Love of the Unhappy and the Outcast

All the Gospel authors agree that Jesus sought the company of "tax-gatherers and sinners," a catchall phrase referring to the great mass of people in ancient Palestine who were socially and religiously unacceptable because they did not or could not keep the Torah's requirements. This "unrespectable" group stood in contrast to the Sadducees, the Pharisees, the scribes, and others who conscientiously observed all Torah regulations in their daily lives. In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus ignores the principle of contamination by association. He eats, drinks, and otherwise intimately mixes with a wide variety of persons commonly viewed as both morally and ritually "unclean." At one moment we find him dining in the homes of socially honored Pharisees (7:36–50) and at the next enjoying the hospitality of social pariahs like **Simon** the leper (Matt. 26:6–13) and Zacchaeus the tax collector (19:1–10). Jesus' habitual associations lead some of his contemporaries to regard him as a pleasure-loving drunkard (7:34). According to Luke, Jesus answers such criticism by creating parables that illustrate God's unfailing concern for persons the "righteous" dismiss as worthless (see Box 9.5).

Parables of Joy at Finding What Was Lost

One of the ethical highlights of the entire New Testament, Luke 15 contains three parables dramatizing the joy humans experience when

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BOX 9.5 The Parable of the Great Banquet: Three Authorial Interpretations

Three Gospels—the canonical Matthew and Luke and the apocryphal Thomas—preserve three strikingly different versions of a parable in which guests who are first invited to a great dinner party fail to respond and are unexpectedly replaced by strangers recruited from the streets. Each of the three versions is distinguished by the distinctive concerns of the individual Gospel writer.

MATTHEW

Then Jesus spoke to them again in parables: "The kingdom of Heaven is like this. There was a king who prepared a feast for his son's wedding; but when he sent his servants to summon the guests he had invited, they would not come. He sent others again, telling them to say to the guests, 'See now! I have prepared this feast for you. I have had my bullocks and fatted beasts slaughtered; everything is ready; come to the wedding at once.' But they took no notice; one went off to his farm, another to his business, and the others seized the servants, attacked them brutally, and killed them. The king was furious; he sent troops to kill those murderers and set their town on fire. Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding-feast is ready; but the guests I invited did not deserve the honour. Go out to the main thoroughfares, and invite everyone you can find to the wedding.' The servants went out into the streets, and collected all they could find, good and bad alike. So the hall was packed with guests.

"When the king came in to see the company at the table, he observed one man who was not dressed for a wedding. 'My friend,' said the king,'how do you come to be here without your wedding clothes?' He had nothing to say. The king then said to his attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot; turn him out into the dark, the place of wailing and grinding of teeth.' For though many are invited, few are chosen."

(Matt. 22:1–14)

LUKE

One of the company, after hearing all this, said to him, "Happy the man who shall sit at the feast in the kingdom of God!" Jesus answered, "A man was giving a big dinner party and had sent out many invitations. At dinner-time he sent his servant with a message for his guests, 'Please come, everything is now ready.' They began one and all to excuse themselves. The first said, 'I have bought a piece of land and I must go and look over it; please accept my apologies.' The second said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am on my way to try them out; please accept my apologies.' The next said,'I have just got married and for that reason I cannot come.' When the servant came back he reported this to his master. The master of the house was angry and said to him, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town, and bring me in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.' The servant said, 'Sir, your orders have been carried out and there is still room.' The master replied, 'Go out on to the highways and along the hedgerows and make them come in; I want my house to be full. I tell you that not one of those who were invited shall taste my banquet.'"

(Luke 14:15–24)

THOMAS

Jesus said, "A person was receiving guests. When he had prepared the dinner, he sent his slave to invite the guests. The slave went to the first and said to that one, 'My master invites you.' That one said, 'Some merchants owe me money; they are coming to me tonight. I have to go and give them instructions. Please excuse me from dinner.' The slave went to another and said to that one, 'My master has invited you.' That one said to the slave, 'I have bought a house, and I have been called away for a day. I shall have no time.' The slave went to another and said to that one, 'My master invites you.' That one said to the slave, 'My friend is to be married, and I am to arrange the banquet. I shall not be able to come. Please excuse me from dinner.' The slave went to another and said to that one, 'My master invites you.' That one said to the slave, 'I have bought an estate, and I am going to collect the rent. I shall not be able to come. Please excuse me.' The slave returned and said to his master, 'Those whom you invited to dinner have asked to be excused.' The master said to his slave, 'Go out on the streets and bring back whomever you find to have dinner.'

"Buyers and merchants [will] not enter the places of my Father."

(G. Thom. 64)

(*continued*)

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BOX 9.5 continued

In Matthew's version of the parable, a king issues invitations to a sumptuous wedding feast for his son. Not only are the ruler's supposed friends indifferent to his hospitality, but some kill the servants who invited them. Furious, the ruler then dispatches armies to destroy those who murdered his emissaries and "burn their city." The king's overreaction to his spurned generosity is even more extreme when one of the rabble brought in to replace the ungrateful guests shows up without the proper festal garments, a social faux pas for which he is tied up and thrown into a frighteningly "dark" prison.

Setting the parable in the narrative context of Jesus' rejection by the Jerusalem authorities, Matthew transforms it into a historical allegory of God's relationship with Israel. When the covenant people reject the invitation to his son's (Jesus') messianic banquet, God's anger results in the Roman destruction of Jerusalem and the replacement of his former people by a new crowd that includes "good and bad alike," the Matthean religious community. The divine host's arbitrary rejection of the improperly dressed guest—who could not reasonably have been expected to be carrying a set of formal attire when he was suddenly dragged to a stranger's wedding—may derive from another (otherwise lost) parable. The supernatural darkness to which the fashion felon is consigned is one of Matthew's characteristic images.

Luke introduces the parable as simply a "big dinner party" given by an ordinary (but presumably rich) host whose prospective guests all turn down his last-minute invitation. The three guests' stated excuses for not attending are entirely reasonable: All are busily engaged in life's ordinary pursuits, tending to their farms, their animals, and their marriages. The spurned host then invites a typically Lukan category of guests—the poor, crippled, lame, and blind, precisely the kind of commonly devalued people that Jesus had already instructed his followers to include in their feasts (cf. Luke 14:12–14). As Matthew had turned a parable involving ungrateful guests into a polemic against the Jerusalem establishment and a justification for Jerusalem's destruction, so Luke makes it into a plea for the social outcasts—those who can't repay one's hospitality—whose cause he espouses throughout his Gospel.

Whereas most traditional folk narratives feature a set of three actions, as does Luke's story of three rejected invitations in his version of the parable, that contained in Thomas breaks the usual pattern by including four guests and their reasons for not attending. All four invited guests are people of property, homeowners, landlords, and financiers—members of the economically successful class of whom most early Christian writers are profoundly suspicious. Thomas's bias is clearly apparent in the parable's final line: The commercial class—"buyers and merchants"—are not God's kind of people.

In its three variations, the banquet parable has one consistent theme: The host has everything ready and, without warning his chosen guests in advance, suddenly demands that they drop everything and come to enjoy his good things. When, busily employed elsewhere, they fail to appreciate his offer, the disappointed host unexpectedly opens his house to people who could not previously consider themselves eligible—loiterers in the marketplace, social pariahs, and anybody else who had no better place to go. Despite the Gospel writers' editorial revisions, themes characteristic of Jesus' authentic parables, including God's incalculable ways of intervening in human lives and the reversals of normal expectations his appeals create, are embedded in the "sweet unreasonableness" of this tale.

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they recover something precious they had thought forever lost.

The Lost Sheep The parable of the lost sheep (also in Matt. 18:10–14) recounts a shepherd's delight in finding a stray animal. In Luke's version, the focus is on the celebration that follows the shepherd's find: "friends and neighbors" are called together to rejoice with him (15:1–7).

The Lost Coin A second parable (15:8–10) invites us to observe the behavior of a woman who loses one of her ten silver coins. She lights her lamp (an extravagant gesture for the poor) and sweeps out her entire house, looking in every corner, until she finds the coin. Then, like the shepherd, she summons "friends and neighbors" to celebrate her find. Although Luke sees these two parables as allegories symbolizing heavenly joy over a "lost" sinner's repentance (15:7, 10), they also reveal Jesus' characteristic tendency to observe and describe unusual human behavior. Both the shepherd and the woman exhibit the intense concentration on a single action—searching for lost property—that exemplifies Jesus' demand to seek God's rule first, to the exclusion of all else (6:22; Matt. 6:33). For the Lukan Jesus, they also demonstrate the appropriate response to recovering a valued object—a spontaneous celebration in which others are invited to participate.

The Prodigal Son One of the most emotionally moving passages in the Bible, the parable of the prodigal son might better be called the story of the forgiving father, for the climax of the narrative focuses on the latter's attitude toward his two very different sons. Besides squandering his inheritance "with his women" (15:30), the younger son violates the most basic standards of Judaism, reducing himself to the level of an animal groveling in a Gentile's pigpen. Listing the young man's progressively degrading actions, Jesus describes a person who is utterly insensitive to his religious heritage and as "undeserving" as a human being can be. Even his decision to return to his father's estate is based on an unworthy desire to improve his diet.

Yet the parable's main focus is not on the youth's unworthiness, but on the father's love. Notice that when the prodigal (spendthrift) is still "a long way off," his father sees him and, forgetting his dignity, rushes to meet the returning son. Note, too, that the father expresses no anger at his son's shameful behavior, demands no admission of wrongdoing, and inflicts no punishment. Ignoring the youth's contrite request to be hired as a servant, the parent instead orders a lavish celebration in his honor.

The conversation between the father and his older son, who understandably complains about the partiality shown to his sibling, makes the parable's theme even clearer. Acknowledging the older child's superior claim to his favor, the father attempts to explain the unlimited quality of his affection (15:11–32). The father's nature is to love unconditionally, making no distinction between the deserving and the undeserving recipients of his care. The parable expresses the same view of the divine Parent, who "is kind to the ungrateful and wicked," that Luke pictured in his Sermon on the Plain (6:35–36).

Like many of Jesus' authentic parables, this tale ends with an essential question unanswered: How will the older brother, smarting with natural resentment at the prodigal's unmerited reward, respond to his father's implied invitation to join the family revel? As Luke views the issue, Jesus' call to sinners was remarkably successful; it is the conventionally religious who too often fail to value an invitation to the messianic banquet.

The Parable of the Dishonest Steward

Not only do Luke's parables surprise us by turning accepted values upside down, consigning the fortunate rich to torment and celebrating the good fortune of the undeserving, but they can also puzzle us. Luke follows the parable of the prodigal son with a mind-boggling story of a dishonest and conniving businessman who cheats his employer and is commended for it (16:1–9).

Teaching none of the conventional principles of honesty or decent behavior, this parable makes most readers distinctly uncomfortable. Like the prodigal son, the steward violates the trust placed in him and defrauds his benefactor. Yet, like the prodigal, he is rewarded by the very person whom he has wronged. This unexpected twist upsets our basic notions of justice and fair play, just as the prodigal's elder brother was upset by having no distinction drawn between

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his own moral propriety and his younger brother's outrageous misbehavior. The meaning Luke attaches to this strange parable—worldly people like the steward are more clever than the unworldly—does not explain the moral paradox. We must ask: In what context, in response to what situation, did Jesus first tell this story? Is it simply another example of the unexpected, or is it a paradigm of the bewilderingly unacceptable that must happen when the kingdom breaks into our familiar and convention-ridden lives? Clearly, Luke's readers are asked to rethink ideas and assumptions previously taken for granted.

The Jerusalem Ministry: Jesus' Challenge to the Holy City

In revising Mark's account of the Jerusalem ministry (see Figure 9.5), Luke subtly mutes Mark's apocalyptic urgency and reinterprets Jesus' kingdom teaching to indicate that many eschatological hopes have already been realized (18:31–21:38). While he preserves elements of traditional **apocalypticism**—urging believers to be constantly alert and prepared for the *eschaton*—Luke also distances the final consummation, placing it at some unknown time in the future. Aware that many of Jesus' original followers assumed that his ministry would culminate in God's government being established on earth, Luke reports that "because he [Jesus] was now close to Jerusalem . . . they thought the reign of God might dawn at any moment" (19:11), an expectation that persisted in the early church (Acts 1:6–7). Luke counters this belief with a parable explaining that their Master must go away "on a long journey" before he returns as "king" (19:12–27). (Matthew also uses this parable of the "talents," in which slaves invest money for their absent owner, for the same purpose of explaining the delayed Parousia.)

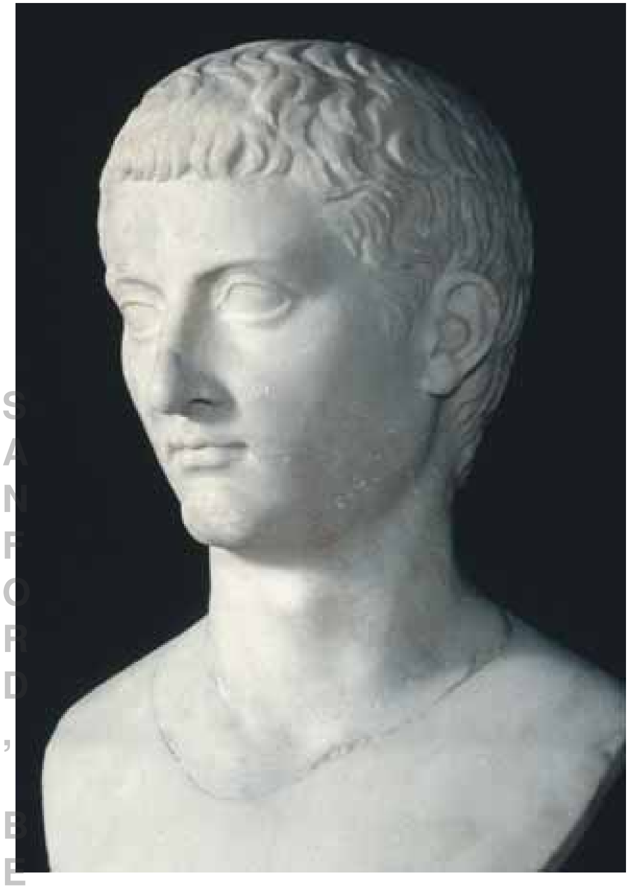

FIGURE 9.5 Bust of the emperor Tiberius (ruled 14–37 CE). According to Luke, Jesus was "about thirty years old" when he began his Galilean campaign during the fifteenth year of Tiberius's reign (c. 27–29 CE) (Luke 3:1, 23). In Acts, Luke notes that Jesus is "a rival king" (Acts 17:8).

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Luke's Modifications of Apocalyptic Expectation

Luke deftly intermingles Markan prophecies about the appearance of the Son of Man with passages from Q and his own special material, suggesting that the kingdom is, in some sense, a present reality in the presence and miraculous deeds of Jesus. When the Pharisees accuse Jesus of exorcising demons by the power of "Beelzebub [Satan]," he answers, "If it is by the finger of God that I drive out the devils, then be sure the kingdom of God has already come upon you" (11:20; cf. Matt. 12:28). The Lukan Jesus equates his disciples' success in expelling demons with Satan's fall from

heaven (10:18–20), a sign that evil has been overthrown and that God's rule has begun. In another saying unique to Luke, Jesus tells the Pharisees: "You cannot tell by observation when the kingdom of God comes. There will be no saying, 'Look, here it is!' or 'there it is!'; for in fact the kingdom of God is among you [or in your midst]" (17:20–21).

While Luke implies that in Jesus' healing work the kingdom now reigns, the author also includes statements that emphasize the unexpectedness and unpredictability of the End. Readers are told not to believe premature reports of Jesus' return, for the world will continue its ordinary way until the Parousia suddenly occurs. Although (in this tradition) arriving without signs, it is as unmistakable as "the lightning flash that lights up the earth from end to end" (17:30). While retaining the Markan Jesus' promise that some of his contemporaries "will not taste death before they have seen the kingdom of God," Luke omits the phrase "already come in power" (9:27; cf. Mark 9:1). For Luke, the mystical glory of Jesus' Transfiguration, which immediately follows this declaration, reveals his divine kingship.

The Fall of Jerusalem and the Parousia

In his edited version of Mark 13, the prophecy of Jerusalem's destruction, Luke distinguishes between the historical event, which he knows took place in the recent past, and the Parousia, which belongs to an indefinite future (21:5–36). The author replaces Mark's cryptic allusion to the "abomination of desolation" (cf. Mark 13:14; Matt. 24:15) with practical advice that warned Christians to flee the city when Roman armies begin their siege (21:20–24). In Luke's modified apocalypse, a period of unknown length will intervene between Jerusalem's fall in 70 CE and the Parousia. The holy city "will be trampled down by foreigners until their day has run its course" (21:24). In Luke's view, this interim of "foreign" domination allows the Christian church to grow and expand throughout the Roman Empire, the subject of his Book of Acts (see Chapter 12).

Luke's editing of Mark 13 indicates that the author divides apocalyptic time into two distinct stages. The first stage involves the Jewish Revolt and Jerusalem's fall; the second involves the Parousia. To describe the second phase, Luke invokes mythic and astronomical language to characterize events: Cosmic phenomena, such as "portents in sun, moon and stars," will herald the Son of Man's reappearance. Although he had previously stated that there will be no convincing "sign" of the End (17:21), Luke nonetheless cites Mark's simile of the fig tree. As the budding tree shows summer is near, so the occurrence of prophesied events proves that the "kingdom" is imminent. Luke also reproduces Mark's confident assertion that "the present generation will live to see it all" (21:32). In its revised context, however, the promise that a single generation would witness the death throes of history probably applies only to those who observe the celestial "portents" that immediately precede the Son's arrival. Luke's muted eschatology does not require that Jesus' contemporaries who heard his teaching and/or witnessed Jerusalem's destruction be the same group living when the Parousia takes place.

Luke does suggest, however, that the astronomical phenomena he predicts may have already occurred. In Acts 2, the author describes the Holy Spirit's descent on Jesus' disciples gathered in Jerusalem, a descent symbolized by rushing winds and tongues of fire. Interpreting this spiritual baptism of the church at Pentecost as a fulfillment of apocalyptic prophecy, Peter is represented as quoting from the Book of Joel, the source of many of the cosmic images Luke employed (Luke 21:25–28):

> No, this [the Pentecost event] is what the prophet spoke of: God says, "This will happen in the last days: I will pour out my spirit upon everyone. . . . And I will show portents in the sky above, and signs on the earth below— blood and fire and drifting smoke. The sun

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> shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before that great, resplendent day, the day of the Lord shall come. And then every one who invokes the name of the Lord shall be saved."
>
> (Acts 2:16–21)

For the Lukan Peter, Joel's metaphors of divine action were fulfilled when the same Spirit that had guided Jesus infused his church, opening the way to salvation for Jew and Gentile alike. After describing Peter's speech, Luke rarely again mentions apocalyptic images or expectations, nor does he show Peter, James, Stephen, Paul (contrary to Paul's own letters), or any other Christian leader preaching Jesus' imminent return. Did he believe that the figurative language of apocalypse is fulfilled primarily in symbolic events of great spiritual significance, such as the birth of the church and the establishment of a community that lived by Jesus' kingdom ethic? (For a discussion of the "realized eschatology"—a belief that events usually associated with the End have already been fulfilled in Jesus' spiritual presence among his followers—that Luke at times seems to anticipate, see Chapter 10, "John's Reinterpretation of Jesus.")

The Final Conflict and Passion Story

Luke's Interpretation of the Passion

Although Luke's account of Jesus' last days in Jerusalem roughly parallels that of Mark (14:1–16:8), it differs in enough details to suggest that Luke may have used another source as well. In this section (22:1–23:56), Luke underscores a theme that will also dominate Acts: Jesus, like his followers after him, is innocent of any sedition against Rome. More than any other Gospel writer, Luke represents Pilate as testifying to Jesus' political innocence, repeatedly declaring that the accused is not guilty of a "capital offence." Only when pressured by a Jerusalem mob does Pilate consent to Jesus' crucifixion.

Besides insisting on Jesus' innocence, Luke edits the Markan narrative (or another tradition parallel to that contained in Mark) to present his own theology of the cross. Mark had stated that Jesus' death was sacrificial: His life is given "as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). In the Lukan equivalent of this passage (placed in the setting of the Last Supper), Jesus merely says that he comes to serve (cf. Mark 10:42–45; Luke 22:24–27). Unlike some other New Testament writers, Luke does not see Jesus' Passion as a mystical atonement for human sin. Instead, Jesus appears "like a servant," providing an example for others to imitate, the first in a line of Christian models that includes Peter, Stephen, Paul, and their companions in the Book of Acts.

The Last Supper

Mark's report of the Last Supper (Mark 14:17–25) closely parallels that found in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 11:23–26). Luke's version introduces several variations: In the Lukan ceremony, the wine cup is passed first and then the unleavened bread. The author may present this different order in the ritual because he wants to avoid giving Jesus' statement about drinking wine again in the kingdom the apocalyptic meaning that Mark gives it. Luke also omits the words interpreting the wine as Jesus' blood, avoiding any suggestion that Jesus sheds his blood to ransom humanity from sin or that he gives his blood to establish a New Covenant. In Luke, Jesus' only interpretative comment relates the bread (Eucharist) to his "body" (22:17–20). The author also inverts Mark's order by having Jesus announce Judas's betrayal after the ritual meal, implying that the traitor was present and participated in the communion ceremony.

Jesus' Final Ordeal

In his report of Jesus' arrest, trials, and crucifixion, Luke makes several more inversions of the

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Markan order and adds new material to emphasize his characteristic themes. Softening Mark's harsh view of the disciples' collective failure, Luke states that they fell asleep in Gethsemane because they were "worn out by grief" (22:45–46). In this scene, the author contrasts Jesus' physical anguish with the spiritual help he receives from prayer. (The assertion that Jesus "sweats blood" may be a later scribal interpolation.) After asking the Father to spare him, Jesus perceives "an angel from heaven bringing him strength," after which he prays even more fervently. In this crisis, Jesus demonstrates the function of prayer for those among the Lukan community who suffer similar testing and persecution (22:39–44).

In describing Jesus' hearing before the Sanhedrin, Luke makes several changes in the Markan sequence of events. In Mark, the High Priest questions Jesus, Jesus is then physically abused, and Peter denies knowing him (Mark 14:55–72). Luke places Peter's denial first, the beating second, and the priest's interrogation third (22:63–71). Instead of announcing his identity as Messiah, as in Mark, the Lukan Jesus makes only an ambiguous statement that may or may not be an admission. Luke also rephrases Jesus' allusion to the "Son of Man" to show that with Jesus' ministry the Son's reign has already begun (22:67–71).

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Herod Antipas In Luke, the Sanhedrin can produce no witnesses and cannot support charges of blasphemy. Its members bring Jesus to Pilate strictly on political terms: The accused "subverts" the Jewish nation, opposes paying taxes to the Roman government, and claims to be the Messiah, a political role. When Pilate, eager to rid himself of this troublesome case, learns that Jesus is a Galilean, and therefore under the jurisdiction of Herod Antipas, he sends the prisoner to be tried by Herod, who is in Jerusalem for the Passover (23:6–12). Found only in Luke, the Herod episode serves to reinforce Luke's picture of an innocent Jesus. Pilate remarks that neither he nor Herod can find anything in Jesus' case to support the Jews' charge of "subversion" (23:13–15).

Twice Luke's Pilate declares that the prisoner "has done nothing to deserve death" (23:15) and is legally "guilty of [no] capital offence" (23:22). The Roman prefect, whom other contemporary historians depict as a ruthless tyrant contemptuous of Jewish public opinion, is here only a weak pawn manipulated by a fanatical group of his Jewish subjects.

Last Words on the Cross In recounting Jesus' crucifixion, Luke provides several "last words" that illustrate important Lukan themes. Only in this Gospel do we find Jesus' prayer to forgive his executioners because they do not understand the meaning of their actions (23:34). Because Luke regards both Jews and Romans as acting in "ignorance" (see Acts 2:17), this request to pardon his tormentors encompasses all parties involved in Jesus' death. Besides illustrating Jesus' heroic capacity to forgive, this prayer shows Luke's hero vindicating his teaching that a victim must love his enemy (6:27–38) and end the cycle of hatred and retaliation that perpetuates evil in the world. To Luke, the manner of Jesus' death represents the supreme parable of reversal, forgiveness, and completion.

Even in personal suffering, the Lukan Jesus thinks not of himself, but of others. Carrying his cross on the road to **Calvary,** he comforts the women who weep for him (23:26–31). He similarly consoles the man crucified next to him, promising him an immediate reward in **paradise** (23:43), perhaps because this fellow sufferer has recognized Jesus' political innocence (23:41). The Messiah's final words are to the Father whose Spirit he had received following baptism (3:21; 4:1, 14) and to whom in death he commits his own spirit (23:46–47).

Except for the symbolic darkness accompanying the Crucifixion (23:44–45), Luke mentions no natural phenomenon comparable to the great earthquake that Matthew describes. Consequently, the Roman centurion does not recognize in Jesus a supernatural being, "a son

of God," as in Mark and Matthew (Mark 15:39; Matt. 27:54). The centurion's remark refers not to Jesus' divinity, but to the political injustice of his execution. "Beyond all doubt," he says, "this man was innocent" (23:47). This account of Jesus' death dramatizes two major Lukan themes: Jesus, rather than being a sacrifice for sin, is an example of compassion and forgiveness for all to emulate; he is also, like his followers, innocent of any crime against Rome.

Like Matthew, Luke generally follows Mark's order through Jesus' burial and the women's discovery of the empty tomb. Omitting any Matthean reference to supernatural phenomena such as an Easter morning earthquake or the appearance of an angel that blinds the Roman guards, Luke diverges from Mark only in that the women report what they have seen to the Eleven, who do not believe them (23:49–24:11). (No Gospel writer except Mark has the women keep silent about their observation.)

Epilogue: Post Resurrection Appearances in the Vicinity of Jerusalem

Because early editions of Mark contain no resurrection narrative, it is not surprising that Matthew and Luke, who generally adhere to Mark's order through the discovery of the empty sepulcher, differ widely in their reports of Jesus' post resurrection appearances. Consistent with his emphasis on Jerusalem, Luke omits the Markan tradition that Jesus would reappear in Galilee (Mark 16:7; Matt. 28:7, 16–20) and places all the disciples' experiences of the risen Jesus in or near Jerusalem.

In concluding his Gospel, the author creates two detailed accounts of Jesus' posthumous teaching that serve to connect Jesus' story with that of the community of believers for whom Luke writes. The risen Jesus' words are not a final farewell, but a preparation for what follows in Luke's second volume, the Book of Acts. Because Luke wishes to show that Jesus' presence and power continue unabated in the work of the early church, he describes Jesus' last instructions in terms that directly relate to the ongoing practices of the church. For Luke, the disciples' original experience of their risen Lord is qualitatively the same spiritually renewing experience that believers continue to enjoy in their charismatic community. Even after ascending to heaven, Jesus remains present in the church's characteristic activities: sharing sacramental meals, studying Scripture, and feeding the poor.

In narrating Jesus' first appearance, on the road to **Emmaus** (a few miles from Jerusalem), Luke emphasizes the glorified Lord's relationship to followers left behind on earth. The two disciples, Cleopas and an unnamed companion (perhaps a woman), who encounter Jesus do not recognize him until they dine together. Only in breaking bread—symbolic of the Christian communion ritual—is Jesus' living presence discerned.

In Luke's second post resurrection account, the disciples are discussing Jesus when he suddenly appears in their midst, asking to be fed—it has been more than three days since the Last Supper, and he is hungry. The Lukan disciples' offering Jesus a piece of cooked fish makes several points: Their job is to care for the poor and hungry whom Jesus had also served; they have fellowship with Jesus in communal dining; and they are assured that the figure standing before them is real—he eats material food—and not a hallucination. By insisting on Jesus' physicality, Luke also firmly links the heavenly Christ and the human Jesus—they are one and the same.

Perhaps most important for Luke's understanding of the way in which Jesus remains alive and present is the author's emphasis on studying the Hebrew Bible in order to discover the true significance of Jesus' career. At Emmaus, Jesus explains "the passages which referred to himself in every part of the scriptures" (24:27), thus setting his listeners'

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"hearts on fire" (24:32). In Jerusalem, he repeats these lessons in biblical exegesis, interpreting the Torah, Prophets, and Writings as Christological prophecies (24:44), an innovative practice that enabled Christians to recognize Jesus in the Mosaic revelation. Luke also connects these post resurrection teachings with the church's task: Jesus' death and resurrection, foretold in Scripture, are not history's final act but the beginning of a worldwide movement. The disciples are to remain together in Jerusalem until Jesus sends the Holy Spirit, which will empower them to proclaim God's new dispensation to "all nations" (24:46–49; fulfilled in Acts 1–2).

Summary

The author of the Gospel traditionally ascribed to Luke, traveling companion of the apostle Paul, wrote primarily for a Gentile audience. His portrait of Jesus reveals a world *sōter* (savior or deliverer), conceived by the Holy Spirit, who launches a new era in God's plan for human salvation. As John the Baptist represents the culmination of Israel's role in the divine plan, so Jesus—healing, teaching, and banishing evil—inaugurates the reign of God, the "kingdom," among humanity.

Emphasizing God's compassion and willingness to forgive all, the Lukan Jesus provides a powerful example for his followers to imitate in service, charity, and good works. An ethical model for Jews and Gentiles alike, Jesus establishes a Spirit-led movement that provides a religion of salvation for all people. The eschatological belief that the Son of Man would return "soon" after his resurrection from the dead is replaced with Luke's concept of the disciples' role in carrying on Jesus' work "to the ends of the earth," a commission that extends the time of the End indefinitely into the future. In the meantime, a law-abiding and peaceful church will convey its message of a Savior for all nations throughout the Roman Empire—and beyond.

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Questions for Review

1. Describe some of Luke's major themes and concerns. How do parables that appear only in Luke's Gospel, such as Lazarus and the rich man and the prodigal son, illustrate typically Lukan ideas?
2. Describe the roles that women play in Luke's account. Which women, absent in Mark and Matthew, appear in Luke's version of Jesus' ministry? What qualities of Jesus does their presence elicit?
3. Evaluate the evidence for and against the tradition that Luke, Paul's traveling companion, wrote the Gospel bearing his name. Because the author was aware that "many" other accounts of Jesus' life and work had already been composed, why did he—who was not an eyewitness to the events he describes—decide to write a new Gospel? Does the fact that the writer added the Book of Acts as a sequel to his Gospel narrative suggest something about his purpose?
4. In the Greco-Roman world, historians and biographers often composed long speeches to illustrate their characters' ideas, ethical qualities, and responses to critical events. Do you find any evidence that Luke uses this method in the Gospel and/or Acts?
5. Show some of the specific ways that Luke's version of Jesus' arrest, trial, and execution reflects an awareness of the political realities with which the Christian community had to deal. How does Luke take pains to show that Jesus is innocent of sedition against Rome?

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. Much of the material that appears only in Luke's Gospel highlights Jesus' concern for women, the poor, and social outcasts. The parables unique to his account—such as the prodigal son, the good Samaritan, and Lazarus and the rich man—emphasize unexpected reversals of society's accepted norms. What view of Jesus' character and teaching do you think Luke wishes to promote?
2. Compare Matthew's Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7) with Luke's similar Sermon on the Plain (6:20–49). When Luke's version of a saying differs from Matthew's, which of the two do you think is probably closer to Jesus' own

words? Do the different versions of the same saying—such as Jesus' blessing of the poor—also illustrate the individual Gospel writer's distinctive viewpoint?

3. Luke's Gospel emphasizes such themes as prayer, the activity of the Holy Spirit, the kingdom's reversal of normal expectations, the rejection of wealth and other material ambitions, Jesus' compassion, and the divine joy in human redemption. How do these themes relate to the author's belief that Jesus' ministry completes the purpose of Israel's revelation and begins a "new age" leading to the kingdom?
4. Luke consistently shows Jesus gravitating toward economically and politically powerless persons, including women, social outcasts, and the poor. Do you think that the Lukan Jesus' concern for socially marginal and "unrespectable" people—such as prostitutes, notorious sinners, and tax collectors who collaborated with the "evil empire" of Rome—is sufficiently recognized or honored by today's political and religious leaders? Can someone be a Christian and *not* follow Jesus' example of siding with the poor and oppressed? Explain your answer.
5. In editing Mark's prophecy of Jerusalem's fall and Jesus' Second Coming, how does Luke modify his predecessor's emphasis on the nearness of End time? Are Luke's changes to Mark's apocalyptic viewpoint consistent with his writing a second book about the purpose and goals of the early Christian church (the Book of Acts)?

Terms and Concepts to Remember

Abraham
Annunciation
apocalypticisim
apology
Benedictus
Calvary
Elijah
Elizabeth and Zechariah
Emmaus
Gabriel
"greater interpolation"
Issac
Joseph
"lesser interpolation"
Levite
L (Lukan) source
Luke
Magnificat
Martha
Mary
Nunc Dimittis
paradise
Pentecost
publican
Samaria
Samaritan
Sarah
Savior (*sōter*)
Sermon on the Plain
Simeon
Simon
theodicy
Theophilus

Recommended Reading

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Talbert, Charles H. *Reading Luke: A Literary and Theological Commentary,* rev. ed. Macon, Ga.: Smyth & Helwys, 2002. An informative study of Luke's historical sweep.

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