This book provides the first complete guide for students to the present state of biblical studies. The twenty-one specially commissioned chapters are written by established scholars from North America and Britain, and represent both traditional and contemporary points of view. The chapters in Part one cover all the methods and approaches currently practised in the academic study of the Bible, while those in Part two examine the major categories of books in the Bible from the perspective of recent scholarship – e.g. historical books of the Old Testament, Gospels, prophetic literature. Major issues raised are: the relation of modern 'critical' study of the Bible to 'pre-critical' and 'post-critical' approaches; the place of history in the study of the Bible; feminist, liberationist and New Histori­cist concerns; the relation of Christian and Jewish scholarship; and recent interest in the Bible as literature.

John Barton is Oriel and Laing Professor of the Interpretation of Holy Scripture, University of Oxford.
CAMBRIDGE COMpanions TO RELIGION
A series of companions to major topics and key figures in theology and religious studies. Each volume contains specially commissioned chapters by international scholars which provide an accessible and stimulating introduction to the subject for new readers and non-specialists.

Published
THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE
edited by Colin Gunton
ISBN 0 521 47118 4 hardback ISBN 0 521 47695 8 paperback

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION
edited by John Barton
ISBN 0 521 48144 9 hardback ISBN 0 521 48593 2 paperback

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO DIETRICH BONHOEFFER
edited by John de Gruchy
ISBN 0 521 58258 X hardback ISBN 0 521 58751 6 paperback

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO LIBERATION THEOLOGY
edited by Christopher Rowland
ISBN 0 521 46144 8 hardback ISBN 0 521 46707 1 paperback

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO KARL BARTH
edited by John Webster
ISBN 0 521 58476 0 hardback ISBN 0 521 58560 0 paperback

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO CHRISTIAN ETHICS
edited by Robin Gill
ISBN 0 521 77070 X hardback ISBN 0 521 77918 9 paperback

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO JESUS
edited by Markus Bockmuehl
ISBN 0 521 79261 4 hardback ISBN 0 521 79678 4 paperback

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO FEMINIST THEOLOGY
edited by Susan Frank Parsons
ISBN 0 521 66327 X hardback ISBN 0 521 66380 6 paperback

Forthcoming
THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO THE GOSPELS
edited by Stephen C. Barton

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO ST PAUL
edited by James D. G. Dunn

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO ISLAMIC THEOLOGY
edited by Timothy J. Winter

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO REFORMATION THEOLOGY
edited by David Bagchi and David Steinmetz

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO JOHN CALVIN
edited by Donald C. McKim

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO MARTIN LUTHER
edited by Donald C. McKim

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO FRIEDRICH SCHLEIERMACHER
edited by Jacqueline Mariña

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO HANS URS VON BALTHASAR
edited by Edward T. Oakes and David Moss

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO POSTMODERN THEOLOGY
edited by Kevin Vanhoozer
Contents

Notes on contributors ix
Glossary xiii

Introduction 1
JOHN BARTON

Part one Lines of approach
1 Historical-critical approaches 9
JOHN BARTON
2 Literary readings of the Bible 21
DAVID JASPER
3 The social world of the Bible 35
KEITH W. WHITELAM
4 Poststructuralist approaches
  New Historicism and postmodernism 50
ROBERT P. CARROLL
5 Political readings of Scripture 67
TIM GORRINGE
6 Feminist interpretation 81
ANN LOADES
7 Biblical studies and theoretical hermeneutics 95
ANTHONY THISELTON
8 The Bible and Christian theology 114
ROBERT MORGAN
9 Biblical study and linguistics 129
WILLIAM JOHNSTONE
10 Aspects of the Jewish contribution to biblical interpretation 143
STEFAN C. REIF
11 The Bible in literature and art 160
STEPHEN PRICKETT

Part two Biblical books in modern interpretation
12 The Pentateuch 181
JOSEPH BLENKINSOPP
13 The historical books of the Old Testament 198
IAIN PROVAN
14 The prophetic books 212
ROBERT R. WILSON
15 The poetic and wisdom books 226
ROBERT ALTER
16 The Synoptic Gospels and Acts of the Apostles
   Telling the Christian story  241
   PHHEME PERKINS
17 John and the Johannine literature
   The woman at the well  259
   JOHN ASHTON
18 The Pauline Letters  276
   JAMES DUNN
19 The non-Pauline Letters  290
   FRANCES YOUNG
20 Apocalyptic literature  305
   JAMES C. VANDERKAM

   General index  323
   Index of biblical references  331
Notes on contributors

ROBERT ALTER is Class of 1937 Professor of Hebrew and Comparative Literature at the University of California at Berkeley. He has written extensively on the novel, on modern Hebrew literature and on literary aspects of the Bible. Among his books on the Bible are The Art of Biblical Narrative (1981), The Art of Biblical Poetry (1985), and Genesis: Translation and Commentary (1996).


JOSEPH BLENKINSOPP was born and educated in England but is a long-time resident of the United States. He has taught at several institutions in Britain and the US and is currently John A. O’Brien Professor of Biblical Studies at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana, USA. His most recent publications are: A History of Prophecy in Israel (1996); Sage, Priest, Prophet: Religious and Intellectual Leadership in Ancient Israel (1995); and Wisdom and Law in the Old Testament. The Ordering of Life in Israel and Early Judaism (1995).

ROBERT P. CARROLL is Professor of Hebrew Bible and Semitic Studies in the University of Glasgow. His publications include When Prophecy Failed (1986); Jeremiah: a Commentary (1986); Wolf in the Sheepfold (1991; 1997); and, edited with Stephen Prickett, the World’s Classics, The Bible: Authorised King James Version (1997).

JAMES DUNN took his first degrees (MA BD) at Glasgow and his PhD at Cambridge, where he was also awarded a DD for his commentary on Romans. After teaching at the University of Nottingham for twelve years he was appointed to the University of Durham, where he holds the Lightfoot Chair of Divinity. His recent publications include: The Acts of the Apostles (TP1, 1996); Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon (1996); New Testament Guides: 1 Corinthians (1995); with A. M. Suggate, A Fresh Look at the Old Doctrine of Justification by Faith (1993, 1994); and The Theology of Paul’s Letter to the Galatians (1993).
Notes on contributors


David Jasper is Reader in Literature and Theology and Vice-Dean of Divinity at the University of Glasgow. Since 1991 he has been Director of the Centre for the Study of Literature and Theology. From 1987 to 1997 he was Senior Editor of the journal *Literature and Theology*. His most recent books are *Rhetoric, Power and Community* (1993) and *Readings in the Canon of Scripture* (1995).

William Johnstone has been Professor of Hebrew and Semitic Languages in the University of Aberdeen since 1980. Among his recent publications are *Exodus* (Old Testament Guides, 1990) and a two-volume commentary on Chronicles, 1 & 2 *Chronicles* (1997); in 1995 he edited a collection of essays on William Robertson Smith (*William Robertson Smith: Essays in Reassessment*).

Ann Loades is Professor of Divinity at the University of Durham. She edited the journal *Theology* for six years, and recently edited two books with Professor David Brown: *The Sense of the Sacramental* (1995) and *Christ the Sacramental Word* (1996). Her most recent publication is *Evelyn Underhill* (1997).


PHEME Perkins is Professor of Theology (New Testament) at Boston College. She has served as President of the Catholic Biblical Association of America and President of the New England Region of the American Academy of Religion. Her most recent books include *Jesus as Teacher* (1991); *Gnosticism and the New Testament* (1993); 1 & 2 Peter, *James and Jude* (1994); the commentary on Mark in the *New Interpreter's Bible* volume VIII (1995) and *Ephesians* (1997). She is presently working on commentaries on the pastoral epistles and Galatians.

Stephen Prickett is Regius Professor of English Language and Literature at the University of Glasgow. He has also held the Chair of English at the Australian National University in Canberra, and taught at the Universities of Sussex, Minnesota, and Smith College, Massachusetts. Among his books on Romanticism, Victorian studies, and literature and theology, are: *Romanticism and Religion: the Tradition of Coleridge and Wordsworth in the Victorian Church* (1976); *The Romantics* (ed. 1981); *Words and the Word: Language, Poetics and Biblical Interpretation* (1986); *Reading the Text: Biblical Criticism and Literary Theory*
Iain Provan is Marshall Sheppard Professor of Biblical Studies at Regent College, Vancouver. His publications include *Hezekiah and the Books of Kings* (1988); *Lamentations* (1991); *1 and 2 Kings* (1995); and *1 & 2 Kings* (Old Testament Guides, 1997).

Stefan C. Reif is Director of the Genizah Research Unit and Head of the Oriental Division at Cambridge University Library. He teaches Hebrew and Jewish studies in the Faculties of Oriental Studies and Divinity at Cambridge and has published widely in these fields, particularly on Jewish liturgy and the Cairo Genizah. His most recent two volumes, both published by Cambridge University Press, are *Judaism and Hebrew Prayer* (1993), which is a survey of Jewish liturgical history, and *Hebrew Manuscripts at Cambridge University Library* (1997), in which he describes Cambridge’s rich collection of over 1,000 Hebrew codices. He is currently working on two books about the Genizah Collection and has just completed a year in Israel as a Professorial Fellow of the Institute for Advanced Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Anthony Thiselton is Professor of Christian Theology and Head of the Department of Theology in the University of Nottingham. He is also Canon Theologian of Leicester Cathedral. His publications include: *The Two Horizons* (1980) and also in Korean (1990); *New Horizons in Hermeneutics. Theology and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (1992, reprinted 1994); and *Interpreting God and the Postmodern Self: on Meaning, Manipulation and Promise* (1995). He serves on the Editorial Boards of *Biblical Interpretation* and *Ex Auditu*; on the Church of England Doctrine Commission and its General Synod, and on the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority.

James C. VanderKam is Professor of Hebrew Scriptures in the Department of Theology at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana. He is a member of the team of scholars who are editing the unpublished Dead Sea Scrolls and is serving as Consulting Editor for six volumes in the series *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert*. He is the author of *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today* (1994); *Enoch: A Man for All Generations* (1995); and has co-edited *The Jewish Apocalyptic Heritage in Early Christianity* (1996). He is one of the two editors-in-chief of the *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (forthcoming).

Keith W. Whitelam is Professor of Religious Studies and Head of Department at the University of Stirling. He is author of *The Invention of Ancient Israel: the Silencing of Palestinian History* (1996); *The Emergence of Early Israel in Historical
Robert R. Wilson is Hoober Professor of Religious Studies and Professor of Old Testament at Yale University. He is the author of *Genealogy and History in the Biblical World* (1977); *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* (1980); and *Sociological Approaches to the Old Testament* (1984). In addition he has contributed numerous articles to journals and reference works on biblical prophecy, law and historiography.

Frances Young is Edward Cadbury Professor of Theology and Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the University of Birmingham. Her research interests are in early Christian theology and biblical interpretation, and in contemporary spirituality and pastoral questions. Her recent publications include *The Theology of the Pastoral Letters* (1994); *Dare We Speak of God in Public?* (1994); and *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (1997).
Glossary

Achaemenids the dynasty that ruled in Persia from 553 to 330 BC, ending with the conquest of Persia by Alexander the Great

aggadah Jewish teaching on non-legal matters (sometimes haggadah)

allegory a text in which the meaning is presented symbolically

androcentric male-centred

angelophany the appearance on earth of an angelic being

anglophone English-speaking

apocalypticism movement of thought concerned with the revelation of heavenly secrets, often in coded form: the secrets frequently concern the end of the present age

aspect in grammar, the way the action of a verb is internally organized, as opposed to tense, which concerns the time of its occurrence. Thus ‘I go’ and ‘I went’ are differences of tense, but ‘I go’, ‘I am going’ and ‘I do go’ are differences of aspect.

canonical criticism a style of biblical interpretation which seeks to respect the canonical status of the text, usually through a synchronic interpretation

Christology theories about the nature of Christ

composite of a text, composed from several discrete sources

cosmology theory about the origin and nature of the universe

cultural relativism the belief that there are no absolute values or truths valid across all cultures

deconstruction an attempt to show how texts ‘subvert’ themselves by undermining their own presuppositions (see chapter 4)

diachronic concerned with historical change; thus a diachronic study of a text is interested in the stages by which the text came into being, as contrasted with a synchronic concern

dissonance theory a sociological theory about the reaction of societies whose hopes and expectations are not fulfilled

docetism theory that Christ was not really human but only appeared so

Enlightenment intellectual movement of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries characterized by belief in reason

eschatology theories about the end of the world or of the present age, or more generally about the purposive course of history

exegesis interpretation, esp. through exact philological study

fictive fictitious

fundamentalism the belief that everything in the Bible is true, usually allied to an evangelical system of doctrine

genetic concerned with origins

halakhah Jewish teaching on matters of conduct (adj. halakhic)

hermeneutical circle the fact that the parts of a text can only be understood in the light of the whole, yet the whole can only be understood through the parts

hermeneutics the science or art of interpretation, formulating general rules about
the meaning of texts; sometimes as a hermeneutic, a particular interpretative technique

Hexateuch the Pentateuch plus Joshua

historical-critical method, historical criticism the attempt to analyse texts in their historical context (see chapter 1)

holistic reading a reading which seeks to interpret biblical texts exactly as they stand – as finished wholes – rather than seeing them as made up of pre-existing components

intertextuality the mutual relationship among texts within a given corpus of literature

koinonia fellowship

liberation theology system of thought and action which asserts that God is on the side of the powerless

mantic connected with prophecy

Massoretic text the standard text of the Hebrew Bible established by the Massoretes in the seventh and eighth centuries AD

midrash Jewish commentary on Scripture

modernism (1) synonym of modernity; (2) esp. in Catholic thought, attempt to apply an Enlightenment appeal to reason to faith and dogma

modernity movement of thought in aesthetics marked by belief in rationality, order and progress

narratology the study and theory of narrative texts

natural theology branch of theology concerned with what can be known of God without divine revelation

New Historicism a style of historiography which attends to the bias in our sources, especially where this tends against the interests of oppressed groups (see chapter 4)

parallelism primary technique of Hebrew verse, whereby the meaning of a line is repeated by using synonyms: ‘he who dwells under the defence of the Most High / abides under the shadow of the Almighty’ (Psalm 91:1)

Pentateuch the five books of Moses – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy

pesher commentary on Scripture concerned with fulfilment of the text at the present day; esp. found in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament

poetics study of literary techniques as forming a system

polysemous having many meanings

postmodernism originally an architectural term, postmodernism denotes a movement of thought which suspects all large-scale explanatory schemes and delights in parody and pastiche (see chapter 4)

poststructuralism movement which extended and also criticized structuralism by showing that the meaning of texts is indeterminate

pseudepigraphic, pseudonymous of texts, attributed to someone other than their true author
Q  a hypothetical document thought to have been drawn on by Matthew and Luke, and accounting for resemblances between them

reader-response criticism  style of literary criticism that stresses the role of the reader in not only perceiving but contributing to the meaning of a text

reception  what texts have been taken to mean

redaction  editing; redaction criticism study of the way biblical books were edited

Second Temple period  the time after the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem in c. 530 BC; often used of the later part of this period, from 300 BC or so

Seleucids  dynasty founded by Seleucus Nicator, one of Alexander the Great's generals, which ruled over Syria-Palestine from 311 to 65 BC

sophia  wisdom

speech-act theory  linguistic theory concerned with the use of speech to perform actions, e.g. naming, blessing, promising

structural linguistics  the synchronic study of language as a structure of interrelated parts, as opposed to historical linguistics

structuralism  linguistic, literary or cultural analysis that finds meaning in the way a text or a culture is ordered, and in the contrasts between its parts

synchronic  concerned with the state of something at a given moment; thus a synchronic study of a text is interested in the interrelation of the parts with each other in its present form, as contrasted with a diachronic concern

synecdoche  figure of speech in which a part represents the whole

Synoptic Gospels  Matthew, Mark and Luke

Synoptic Problem  the question how the interrelationships among the Synoptic Gospels are to be explained

Talmud  massive compilation of Jewish teaching published in fifth century AD and existing in two editions, Babylonian and Palestinian

Tenakh  Jewish acronym for Scripture: the Law, the Prophets and the Writings (Torah, Nebiim, Ketubim); also Tanak, Tanakh

Tetrateuch  the first four books of the Pentateuch

The Twelve  the twelve 'Minor Prophets' (a title common in Judaism)

theophany  an appearance of God on earth

Torah  the Jewish Law or teaching, conceived of as contained in the Pentateuch and in oral traditions deriving from it

tradition history  attempt to discover the way in which various historical traditions developed in the telling

typology  drawing parallels between people or events in different periods, e.g. Jesus and Moses

womanism  movement of thought among non-white women corresponding to white feminism


Discovery (1945) of a Coptic collection of Jesus’ sayings in gnostic texts (copied in the fourth century CE), the Gospel of Thomas provided evidence for independent collections of Jesus’ sayings. Scholars have used the Q traditions and variants from the Gospel of Thomas to construct pre-Gospel texts.
for Q. Some propose to isolate stages in the collected sayings that separate earlier versions in which Jesus is a spokesperson for wisdom, from later depiction of Jesus as a prophet of the coming judgement (see Catchpole, The Quest for Q). These results seek evidence for Jesus’ teaching from the earliest decades of Christianity.

The claim to uncover a Jesus wisdom figure who promised experience of God’s saving presence and did not speak of God’s impending judgement has been sharply criticized. It would remove Jesus from the Jewish religious sentiments associated with John the Baptist. The Gospels insist that Jesus’ message that the reign of God is breaking into human experience constituted his response to the Baptist (Mark 1:2–15; Matthew 3:1–17, 4:12–17; Luke 3:1–22; and John 3:22–30; 4:1–3). Other scholars retain the apocalyptic expectation found in the Matthew/Luke stratum of Q. The Jesus represented by Q and the synoptic depictions of Jesus’ teaching present him as healer and eschatological prophet/teacher (see Meier, A Marginal Jew).

**GENRE OF THE GOSPELS**

How the Synoptic Gospels describe Jesus’ teaching and death is not merely a question of reconstructing sources. It also asks what literary models shaped their composition (Aune, The New Testament; Burridge, What Are the Gospels?). Use of the word ‘gospel’ in Mark 1:1 parallels the Pauline epistles: ‘gospel’ designates the apostolic preaching of salvation in the crucified and risen Son of God (Romans 1:1; 1 Corinthians 9:14; Galatians 2:2; Philippians 1:7). Matthew and Luke have each replaced Mark’s introduction with literary designations. Matthew 1:1 opens with ‘book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ’. *Biblos geneseōs* probably refers just to the account of Jesus’ descent, birth and how he came to be from Nazareth (Matthew 1–2). It reminds readers of the genealogical lists which established the identity of the people of God (Moloney, ‘Beginning the Gospel of Matthew’).


Scholars debate whether or not the Gospels are examples of the Greco-Roman ‘life’. Mark’s narrative recounts only the ministry of Jesus that leads up to his death. The passion narrative focuses on a death seen as dishonourable by ancient standards. Divine exaltation of Jesus in resurrection does
not appear in Mark. Both Luke and Matthew expand Mark in ways more typical of a Greco-Roman biography. The ‘infancy narratives’ (Matthew 1:18–2:23; Luke 1:5–2:52) draw on independent traditions to describe the birth and childhood of the hero. Matthew and Luke both conclude with resurrection as divine vindication, which establishes the universal validity of Jesus’ teaching. By incorporating sayings material into Mark, Matthew and Luke establish Jesus’ superiority as a teacher. Matthew provides discourses which summarize Jesus’ message (Matthew 5–7, 10, 13, 18, 24–5). The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7) adapts a well-known Greco-Roman form, the ‘epitome’ or compendium of a philosopher’s teaching (Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*). These additions indicate that Matthew and Luke understood the gospel genre as a ‘life’ of its central figure. Jewish story patterns also play an important part in the Gospel accounts. For example, the stories of Elijah and Elisha (1 Kings 17–19, 21; 2 Kings 1–2) include healing, multiplication of loaves, and raising the dead. The *Lives of the Prophets* (first century CE) extends the violence found in the life of Jeremiah to the other prophets. This pattern provides a context for ending the Gospel with Jesus’ rejection and death (*Lives of the Prophets* 23,1, on the death of Zechariah; see Luke 11:51//Matthew 23:35).

**COMMUNAL SETTING AND GOSPEL NARRATIVE**

Do the Gospel narratives provide clues to a communal setting for which each evangelist wrote? The turmoil found in the apocalyptic discourse (Mark 13:14, 23, 37) leads some scholars to treat Mark as an example of sectarian apocalyptic which aims to shore up the faith of a minority (lest they deny Jesus like Peter, Mark 14:29–31, 66–72). Since Mark explains Jewish customs (7:3,4,11,19), currency (12:42) and Aramaic words (5:41; 7:34; 15:22,34), the audience would appear to be unfamiliar with Palestinian Jews. Other interpreters highlight the passion of Jesus. Halfway through Mark, Peter’s identification of Jesus as messiah leads to the first passion prediction (8:27–38). The disciples’ incomprehension (8:32; 9:32; 10:32) mirrors cultural reactions to crucifixion, the ignominious punishment for slaves and criminals (cf. Philippians 2:8; 1 Corinthians 1:22–4). Therefore one might conclude that though the primary audience is believers, Mark addresses an apologetic to sympathetic outsiders (see the summary in Guelich, *Mark 1–8:26*, pp. xxxvii–xliii).

Other approaches focus on ideological tensions between source materials and the Gospel as a whole. Mark’s readers first encounter a Jesus whose
words and miraculous deeds impress others with his authority (1:21–8). But these impressive deeds fail to produce a reliable faith in disciples, who are often frightened and uncomprehending (e.g. 4:13, 40). Some interpreters think that this tension was directed against the ideology of a miracle-working Jesus and his charismatic imitators (see Matthew 7:22–3, for such charismatics). Other interpreters treat the suppression of charismatic prophecy as evidence of the tension between the world of oral preaching with its emphasis on immediate experiences of Jesus’ power and that of a textualized tradition which sets its founding figure and deeds in the past (see Bryan, A Preface to Mark).

Attempts to move from the text of a Gospel to statements about the author’s community have been challenged by insights from modern literary criticism (Donahue, ‘Windows and Mirrors’). Analysis should attend to the narrative whole. The reader’s interaction with a text creates a picture of the narrator and the audience. In the Gospels, the narrator is a reliable, third-person voice with access to the innermost thoughts of Jesus (e.g. Mark 14:32–42). Readers identify with that voice rather than the misunderstandings attributed to Jesus’ disciples. Since the narrator provides interpretations of what transpires, the failings of Jesus’ followers should not be considered evidence for either the actual relationship between Jesus and his disciples or for conflict between the evangelist and others claiming the authority of the Twelve (Best, Mark. The Gospel as Story; ‘Mark’s Narrative Technique’).

**DISCIPLES AND OTHER CHARACTERS**

The disciples and other groups within a Gospel are figures whose relationship to Jesus changes during the narrative. Mark presents four groups: opponents, relatives of Jesus, crowds and the Twelve. The opposition is predominantly Jewish religious leaders. Readers are told that Jesus’ authority is greater than theirs (1:22); that he is preaching in their synagogues (1:45), challenging their understanding of the Law (2:1–3:6; 7:1–23). The hostility Jesus provokes will prove deadly (3:6). Jesus’ exorcisms lead to charges of practising magic, as well as isolation from relatives who think that he is demented (3:20–34). The ensuing exchange reveals that scribe-opponents are committing the deadly sin of calling the work of God’s Spirit Satan’s (3:29–30).

Jesus calls for a new definition of ‘family’. Biological relationships do not count. Jesus’ family consists of those who do the will of God (3:34; see Smith, “Inside” and “Outside”). Where Mark’s account leaves some uncertainty
over the attitude of his relatives (heightened in 6:1–6a), Matthew and Luke indicate that Jesus’ family are among the faithful. For Luke, Jesus’ family are among the pious of Israel who await God’s salvation. Mary is an exemplary disciple (1:38; 2:19, 35, 51; 8:21). Matthew describes Joseph as a ‘righteous man’ (1:19). ‘Righteousness’ is the key term in Matthew’s understanding of Christian discipleship. To be ‘righteous’ means doing the will of God (7:21; 12:50; 21:31). God reveals the identity of Jesus to Joseph in a dream (Matthew 1:21): ‘he will save his people from their sins’. This salvation is realized when Jesus sheds his blood on the cross (Matthew 26:28). By developing the picture of Jesus’ family as part of Jesus’ ministry, Matthew and Luke both bring their narratives closer to the \textit{bios} genre where the hero’s origins indicate his future destiny.

Matthew and Luke also provide different perspectives on the opposition to Jesus. Just as Luke’s Jesus was born among a pious, expectant people (Luke 1:44–5; 2:22–38), so the people continue to hang on Jesus’ words. Their leaders are responsible for the execution of this popular teacher (Luke 19:47–8; 20:1–6, 19, 26, 45; 22:2; 23:5, 35; 24:19–20). They are repeating the ancestral pattern. Jerusalem continues to murder prophets (Luke 13:33–5) instead of becoming the city of peace (19:41–4). The Jewish historian Josephus attributed the destruction of the city to extremist leaders, who overwhelmed the moderates urging peace (Josephus, \textit{War} xvi, 4–5).

Like Josephus, Luke presumes that the Herodians interpreted Jewish affairs for the Romans. Consequently, his passion narrative has Pilate send Jesus to Herod for a hearing (23:6–12; also Agrippa and Bernice in Paul’s trial, Acts 25:13–26:32). Hostile parties manage to manipulate the situation. Luke retains the opposition of scribes and Pharisees from his sources, but moderates its vehemence (6:11; contrast Mark 3:6). Luke also introduces a new motive in describing the Pharisees. Their failure to respond to Jesus stems from greed (Luke 16:14) and lack of compassion (7:36–50). However, their opposition is not presented as uniform. Some show hospitality (7:36; 14:1) or concern for Jesus (13:31).

Matthew treats the Pharisees as the primary enemy (see Saldarini, ‘Boundaries and Polemics’). They are castigated for outward forms of religion that gain them honour and respect while disregarding justice and mercy (Matthew 6:2–6; 15:1–9; 23:1–36). Jesus’ denunciation of their hypocrisy (23:37–9) makes them responsible for Jerusalem’s fate. Tensions between Matthew’s audience and other Jews appear in references to ‘their’ synagogues (4:23; 9:35; 10:17, responsible for persecuting Jesus’ followers; 12:9; 13:54), scribes (7:29; contrast ‘scribe trained for the Kingdom’, 13:52)
and ‘the Jews to this day’ (28:15). Yet affirmation of Jesus’ mission to the lost sheep of Israel (10:5–6), the continued validity of the Law (5:17–19) and even of some Jewish teaching (23:2) as well as solidarity with fellow Jews in paying the Temple tax (17:24–7) suggest an ongoing relationship between Matthean Christians and the larger Jewish community. Is the mission to the lost sheep of Israel over (see Luz, The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew)? Or does Matthew still anticipate bringing together Jew and Gentile under the messiahship of Jesus (so Saldarini, ‘Boundaries and Polemics’)?

Matthew contains warnings about persecution. In the Sermon on the Mount, those who seek to follow Jesus’ path of a ‘higher righteousness’ can anticipate suffering (5:10) and forms of verbal slander (5:11–12). Disciples must love and pray for their persecutors (5:44; cf. Romans 12:14). What was an apocalyptic sign of the evil endtime in Mark 13:9–13 has become part of the routine preparation of the disciple missionary in Matthew 10:16–23. Though Matthew depicts this mission as limited to the lost sheep of Israel (10:5, 23), disciplinary actions are not confined to synagogues, but include testimony before leaders, kings and the gentiles (verses 16–17). A prophetic woe oracle against scribes and Pharisees depicts them as filling up the sins of their ancestors by crucifying, beating in their synagogues and persecuting the prophets, wise men and scribes whom God sends (Matthew 23:34). Since this oracle is followed by the lament over a destroyed Jerusalem (23:37–9), Matthew shows that Jesus’ prophetic word came true. Matthew’s ending demonstrates that Jesus’ disciples are now to go beyond the towns of Israel to the nations (28:16–20).

**JESUS’ DISCIPLES AS GOSPEL CHARACTERS**

The question of historical fact over against literary portrayal emerges as soon as one attends to Mark’s description of the disciples. The crowds are leaderless sheep (6:34) who follow Jesus because of his impressive miracles and teaching (1:27; 3:7–8; 6:53–6; 11:18) but do not have real understanding (4:12 citing Isaiah 6:9). Their reaction to miracles contrasts with the individuals who demonstrate their faith (Marshall, Faith as a Theme). Such persons are outsiders who have to overcome some social boundary in order to experience healing (paralytic, 2:1–12; Jairus, 5:21–4, 35–43; woman with a haemorrhage, 5:25–34; Syrophoenician woman, 7:24–30; blind Bartimaeus, 10:46–52). Matthew and Luke generally follow Mark’s description of the crowd and the unusual examples of faith that emerge from the margins of society.
Mark's paradoxical description of Jesus' disciples will be considerably modified by the other evangelists. Apart from Jesus, the disciples are the key figures in the story. Mark's portrayal is not intended to be historical description. It engages readers in a process of re-evaluating Jesus' mission. (On Mark's use of narrative surprises, see Best, 'Mark's Narrative Technique'.) Insofar as the disciples fail to grasp Jesus' teaching at key points, the reader's attention to those points is sharpened. Mark follows the summary of Jesus' preaching (1:15) with the call of the first four disciples (1:16–20). Three of the four, Peter and the sons of Zebedee, have special experiences of Jesus' ministry (healing of Jairus' daughter, 5:37; Transfiguration, 9:2; in Gethsemane, 14:33). But this special relationship does not enable them to understand Jesus' messiahship. The Transfiguration leaves them confused and silent. In Gethsemane, they fail to watch with the Lord. Though Peter recognizes Jesus as God's anointed, he rejects the suffering Son of Man (8:31–3). James and John think that the 'kingdom' means Jesus will be handing out positions of authority (10:35–45). Their request recapitulates an episode in which the disciples were arguing over greatness (9:33–7). Thus Mark's readers are reminded that disciples follow the model of the suffering messiah (8:34–8; 9:35–7; 10:38–9, 42–5). The Gospel prepares for these misunderstandings by showing that the disciples had difficulty with Jesus' parables (4:13). Jesus' invitation to discipleship is refused by the rich man (10:17–22). That episode reminds readers that Jesus' disciples were willing to leave all things (10:29).

Elsewhere fear overwhelms the disciples. Despite evidence of Jesus' divine power, they lack faith (4:35–41). Even the disciples can have hardened hearts (6:45–52). Consequently, the reader is not surprised by the fearful disciples during the events of the passion. The fleeing disciples are joined by a mysterious young man, who runs away naked (14:50, 51–2). Peter's attempt to follow Jesus is thwarted by his denial (14:66–72). Both the flight and Peter's denial are predicted by Jesus (14:27–31). Thus, whatever their failures, the bond which unites Jesus with his disciples is not broken (Brown, The Death of the Messiah).

The other evangelists moderate the problematic elements in Mark. Where Jesus charged the disciples with 'no faith' (Mark 4:40), Matthew has 'little faith' (8:26) and Luke simply has Jesus ask where their faith is (8:25). Luke omits Peter's protest against Jesus' prediction of suffering. Matthew separates that episode from Peter's confession of Jesus as messiah by sayings about God as the source of Peter's insight, Peter's name, 'rock' and the indestructibility of the church built on this apostolic foundation (16:17–23). Luke
assures readers that although Peter will deny Jesus, Jesus’ prayer on his behalf guarantees his repentance and the future strengthening of the others (22:31–4). Luke transposes the dispute over greatness to the Supper narrative (22:24–6) and follows it with Jesus’ self-description as ‘one who serves’ (22:27) and the promise that the disciples will share the messianic banquet (22:28–30). Matthew shifts the burden of requesting authority in the Kingdom from the sons of Zebedee to their mother (20:20–1). He follows Mark’s version of the sleeping disciples in Gethsemane, but Luke moderates that incident in two ways. He reduces the triadic repetition to a single event framed with injunctions to pray not to enter into temptation (22:40–6) and explains the sleeping as evidence of sorrow (verse 45).

RESOLVING AMBIGUITY

These modifications resolve semantic ambiguity in the inherited story and depart from Mark’s tactic of forcing the reader to decipher its meaning. Mark’s conclusion pushes the strategy of surprising the reader by withholding anticipated meaning to the extreme (Hester, ‘Dramatic Inconclusion’). Jesus cries out as the abandoned sufferer of Psalm 22 (15:34–7). This cry might appear to confirm the mocking charge (referred to as ‘blasphemy’ in verse 29) that Jesus had been able to save others but could not rescue himself (15:30–2). Has Jesus been taken in by the hostility of his enemies? Suddenly, the ‘destroyed’ temple prophecy is proleptically fulfilled in the torn Temple veil (verse 38). Jesus’ power to ‘save’ is demonstrated by the centurion’s confession, ‘truly this man was Son of God’ (verse 39). However, the evangelist does not let the story rest there. An angelophany at the empty tomb (16:6–7) confirms Jesus’ earlier prediction that he would be raised (14:28) only to have the Gospel conclude with the women fleeing in silence (verse 8a). Readers must resolve this new tension from experiences of Christian faith.

Mark 15:39 is the last of three scenes in which the phrase ‘Son of God’ reveals Jesus’ mission: at his baptism, the divine voice speaks to Jesus (Mark 1:11); at the Transfiguration, to three uncomprehending disciples (9:7). Otherwise, only the demons whom Jesus exorcizes and silences refer to him as ‘Son of God’ (5:7) until the interrogation of Jesus by the High Priest links the claim to be anointed by God with a claim to be ‘son of the Blessed One’ (14:61). Modern interpretations of Mark recognize the dramatic significance of a human voice acclaiming Jesus ‘Son of God’ at the moment of death on the cross. But the implausibility of a centurion voicing the central christological affirmation of the Gospel (1:1) has generated conflicting explana-
tions. The simplest presumes that Mark has adapted an inherited tradition to set the faith of his Gentile church in a positive light. What the Jewish high priest called blasphemy, Christians recognize as the saving message of the gospel (cf. Romans 3:21–6; 1 Cor 1:18–25; 2:6–9). Viewed from a dramatic perspective, having the confession of faith voiced by an outsider leaves room for the mysterious ambiguity and tragedy of the Gospel’s conclusion (on Mark as tragedy, see Smith, ‘Divine Tragedy’).

Matthew and Luke take different approaches to resolving the ambiguity of the centurion’s confession in Mark 15:39 (see Brown, The Death of the Messiah). Matthew does not assume that the centurion represented later believers. He adds apocalyptic signs, which terrify the Roman guards into recognizing that a great man has died (27:51–4). Just as astronomical signs accompanied Jesus’ birth (2:1–2), so cosmic disruption occurs at the moment of death. Luke’s Jesus is an exemplary martyr. Some New Testament manuscripts include a prayer for the forgiveness of his enemies (23:34). A dialogue with the criminals demonstrates that heavenly life with Jesus will come to those who repent (23:39–43). Jesus dies calmly. The centurion glorifies God by proclaiming Jesus righteous, and the crowds, who remained sympathetic to Jesus, lament (23:44–7). Thus, Jesus does not die alone, abandoned and mocked by all. For Matthew, God responds at the moment of death with signs of judgment. For Luke, Jesus’ piety and goodness shine through.

MATTHEW REVISES MARK

The dynamic activity of constructing the story from paradoxical narrative clues, an ironic posture towards the heroic and scepticism about the realist claims that God raised Jesus bodily also makes modern literary critics appreciate Mark’s narrative style. Discipleship that comes from the margins and follows Jesus in unseating the centres of power, whether demonic, deriving from illness or sin, religious or socio-economic, makes the suffering Son of Man in Mark a model for effective action, not social conformity. Believers are reassured that ‘all things are possible to those who believe’ (9:23, 28–9; 11:24–5).

Unlike modern readers, Matthew and Luke read Mark within the conventions of the ancient ‘life’ that highlight the exemplary character and teaching of the hero (pace Luz, ‘Fiktivität’, who treats Matthew as realistic historical fiction in which the post-Easter situation of the Church is mirrored in the Jesus story). Matthew’s catechetical interests are most evident in the
five discourses which form the core of the account of Jesus’ ministry. The Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5–7) summarizes Jesus’ teaching. The Beatitudes (5:3–12) describe those who will experience God’s salvation. As the ‘poor in spirit’, the pious who wait for God’s salvation, their single-hearted devotion to God puts them among the lowly and the persecuted of this world. However, they are not passive victims. They exhibit the active characteristics of mercy, striving to make peace and willingness to suffer in order to testify to Jesus. Their witness fulfils the ancient prophetic promise of bringing God’s light to the nations (5:13–16). The Lord’s Prayer (6:9–13) and sayings about being anxious (6:25–34) assure disciples that God will provide for their needs. Evidence that Jesus’ teaching brings the Law to its intended perfection (5:17–20) is given in a series of antithetical sayings and illustrative examples (5:21–48). Though these sayings are often treated as an ‘impossible ideal’, ancient Jewish and pagan moralists commonly agreed that the truly wise person has control of the passions which dominate most human lives.

The brief catechesis on piety (6:1–13) addresses another topic which ancient moralists considered essential to the good life. It has been organized around the three elements of Jewish piety: fasting, almsgiving and prayer. Like the antitheses, this piety does not depend upon the social support or public praise that lead others to engage in these activities. In the style of Old Testament prophets (e.g. Isaiah 1:12–17), Matthew reminds readers that piety cannot be separated from the justice and mercy that are at the heart of the Law (cf. Matthew 23:23). Disciples must extend the forgiveness for which they pray to others (6:14–15) and refrain from passing judgement (7:1–5). The golden rule concludes the Sermon’s ethical teaching (7:12). Warnings about distorted teaching within the community follow (7:13–27). The Sermon’s conclusion describes the disciples’ response, recognition that Jesus’ authority is greater than that of the scribal interpreters of the Law (7:28–9).

As an epitome of Jesus’ teaching, the Sermon on the Mount speaks of moral conduct in general. However, Matthew has incorporated warnings for the Christian community. False teachers might undermine Jesus’ teaching. Throughout his Gospel, Matthew insists that belief in Jesus together with following his teaching does not exempt believers from God’s judgement (7:21–3). He attaches a judgement parable about the guest who lacks the wedding garment to the parable of the elect gathered from the margins into God’s banquet (22:11–14). Two discourses speak directly to communal concerns: missionary activity (10:1–11:1) and relationships within the com-
The Synoptic Gospels and Acts of the Apostles 251

munity (18:1–35). The parables discourse (3:1–52) has taken the idea that parables are concealed speech from Mark. Jesus’ followers recognize the ‘secrets of the kingdom’. Outsiders whose hearts remain closed to God’s word fulfil the prophecy of Isaiah 6:9–10 (13:10–17; Mark 4:10–12). Matthew modifies the Markan hint that Jesus’ disciples might share the hardness of heart found among outsiders (cf. Mark 8:17–18).

Matthew 13:34–5 also corrects the suggestion in Mark 4:33 that parabolic speech was an accommodation, not a hindrance, to the understanding of the crowds. Jesus speaks in parables to fulfil the words of the prophet (citing Psalm 78:2). Matthew clarifies Jesus’ words for the audience. Explanations are for the disciples (as in Mark 4:34; Matthew 13:10, 17, 36, 51–2a). The parables of the sower (13:1–9), weeds among the wheat, mustard seed and leaven (verses 24–33) are directed at the crowds.

The Gospel’s final discourse contains judgement sayings and parables (24:1–25:46). The opening section, a revision of the apocalyptic discourse in Mark 13:1–37, follows the demands of the genre for private instruction of Jesus’ disciples. Parables warn readers to remain vigilant, since the day of judgement will come without warning. Three concluding parables underline the need to observe the teaching of Jesus. The allegory of prudent and foolish serving girls warns that those who lack ‘oil’ cannot make up for it at the last minute (25:1–13); servants who fail to increase an absent master’s wealth will be cast out (verses 14–30); and the separation between the ‘sheep’ and ‘goats’ depends upon how they have responded to the ‘little ones’, the poor, the prisoner, the stranger (verses 31–46).

Though the servant parables suggest addressees who are attached to a particular ‘lord’, the parable of the sheep and the goats has neither group recognize Jesus’ identity. The expressions ‘my brothers’ (verse 40) and ‘little ones’ (verse 45; identified as referring to Christians in 18:10, 14) used for those with whom the master identifies implies that Christians are the objects of the activities represented. Consequently, the final scenario shifts from judging disciples to humanity in general. Non-Christians, who have no explicit relationship to Jesus, will be held accountable for how they have responded to the suffering ‘little ones’ in their midst. The weighty matters of the Law, which Matthew thinks can never be overridden, ‘justice, mercy, and faith’, are not peculiar to Christians. Nor should Matthew’s emphasis on judgement obscure the equally strong conviction that God offers forgiveness to those who are willing to show mercy. Other interpreters point out that the ‘little ones’ in this passage are like the Christian missionaries of Matthew 10, radically dependent upon the hospitality of those among whom they work.
252 Pheme Perkins

(10:9-14, 40-2). They argue that this passage only speaks of persons who would have heard of Jesus through Christian preaching – even if they did not respond by joining the church. According to this reading, Matthew is not proposing a theological answer to the question of anonymous Christianity among the pagans. Instead, the evangelist has a more limited agenda. Humans will be judged by their response to those who come bearing God’s word (see Hagner, Matthew 14-28). This passage looks forward to the mission among the nations with which the Gospel concludes (28:16–20).

LUKE CONTINUES THE STORY

Matthew has embedded a vision of the church’s future as ‘light of the world’ in the story of Jesus. Though such hints can also be detected in Luke (e.g. Luke 21:7–24), his Gospel ends with a striking new turn (24:47–53). A second volume (Acts) describes the emergence of the church. Both are embraced by the designation at the beginning of the Gospel, diegēsis, an exposition of events that happened – or could have happened (Tannehill, The Narrative Unity of Luke–Acts). The ascension of Jesus (Acts 1:6–11) highlights the difference between the time of Jesus and the time of the Church’s mission which is to continue until Jesus returns (verse 11). Stories about the apostles parallel similar accounts in the Gospels. In some cases details from an Acts story are not found in Luke's Gospel, but might have been taken from Luke’s source. The healing of Tabitha/Dorcas in Acts 9:36–41 repeats the raising of the dead in a manner similar to the daughter of Jairus (Mark 5:35–43; Luke 8:49–55). Unlike the version in his Gospel, in Acts Luke retains the Aramaic flavour of Jesus’ words found in the Markan story. The Aramaic form of Dorcas’ name, ‘Tabitha’, combined with the command to arise (verse 40) is close to Mark’s version of the miracle. Other details reflect Luke’s familiarity with the Septuagint. Peter prays alone in the presence of the dead body as Elisha had done (2 Kings 4:33). Tabitha opens her eyes as in the Elisha story (2 Kings 4:35). This story also has ties with Jesus healing the widow’s son at Nain (Luke 7:11–17). At the healer’s word of command, both sit up. Knowledge of the miracle spreads around the region and leads people to faith in the Lord.

This example indicates that detecting sources within the text of Acts is complicated by the author’s ability to draw multiple allusions into a single episode. Some manuscripts of Acts contain an additional phrase attached to Peter’s command in 9:40, ‘in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ’. While it is easy to see this phrase as an expansion of a theme attached to healings by the

Apostles in Acts, which are done by the power of Jesus' name (Acts 3:6, for example), the variant appears in manuscripts which are classified as belonging to the Western text type. It diverges sharply from the Alexandrian text type generally considered closest to the original text and the basis for modern editions of the Greek text. Primary witnesses to the Western text type include the bilingual (Greek/Latin) Codex Bezae (c. fifth century CE), the Syriac Peshitta and the citations of Acts found in Irenaeus (c. 180 CE). The Western text type serves as a reminder that the stable text which modern readers take for granted in literary analyses did not exist in the world of hand copied manuscripts (see Barrett, The Acts of the Apostles, pp. 20-9; on books in early Christianity, see Gamble, Books and Readers).

Luke’s narrative employs variations as the same episode is retold. See the accounts of Paul’s conversion (Acts 9:1-31; 22:6-21; 26:9-23). They contradict Paul’s own assertion that he remained unknown to Christians in Judea after his conversion (Galatians 1:17-24). The geographical formalism of Luke’s account requires that Paul, like the other apostles, begin his activity in Jerusalem. Through Paul the risen Lord’s directions will be accomplished. The Gospel will be taken from Jerusalem to Rome. The second and third accounts of Paul’s conversion belong to speeches made during the trial process that will send him to Rome. Paul highlights his obedience to divine commands. He did not remain in Jerusalem because of hostility against him. God’s providence preserved the apostle by sending him among the Gentiles (22:17-21). In the second speech, Paul has sealed his destiny by appealing to the right of a Roman citizen to appear before Caesar in Rome (25:21-7; on citizen rights, see Rapske, The Book of Acts, pp. 71-112). The speech is framed as a finding of evidence. Paul describes his anti-Christian persecutions as evidence that he once belonged among the authorities who now accuse him. He emphasizes the divine origins of his preaching, its continuity with ancestral tradition and its moral rectitude. Preaching Christ to the Gentiles is a call to convert from doing evil to doing good (26:16-23). Paul succeeds in persuading his audience. Had he not appealed to Caesar, they would have freed him (verses 24-32).

These examples indicate that Luke follows the practice of ancient writers and provides speeches suitable to the narrative circumstances in which characters find themselves (Soards, ‘The Speeches in Acts’). Peter’s sermon on Pentecost (2:14-36) initiates a series of speeches in which the appeal to conversion outlines the Christian message: (1) Jesus’ life, death and resurrection proves that the age of salvation has dawned; (2) Jesus is exalted at the right hand of God; (3) the Holy Spirit operating through the apostles
demonstrates the power and glory of the exalted Christ; (4) Christ will return at the end of the age; (5) summons to conversion. In the earliest speeches, Peter calls those responsible for the death of Jesus to repent (3:19–21). Large numbers of the people respond positively. The community they form lives in exemplary piety, peace and solidarity (Acts 2:43–7; 4:23–37).

The apostles are steadfast in their testimony to the gospel despite imprisonment (4:1–23; 5:17–42). Luke brings this period to its climax with the martyrdom of Stephen. His sharp condemnation of the Temple cult and Jewish unbelief strikes a jarring note (7:1–53). This speech follows the common pattern in which martyrs about to die challenge impious tyrants who attack the righteous (see 2 Maccabees 7:1–42). Stephen's death marks a major transition in the story. Persecution forces many Christians out of Jerusalem so that the message begins to spread among the nations. Determination to eradicate the growing sect also sets Paul on the Damascus road where he is converted by a vision of the Lord (9:1–30). Other visions orchestrate Peter's journey to baptize the pious centurion, Cornelius (10:1–11:18). Ancient readers cannot but recognize the hand of God at work in directing the growth of the Christian movement. Divine judgement is at work when Herod meets a gruesome death (12:1–23).

At this point, Luke introduces another development. The incidental episodes of Gentile conversion give way to the systematic missionary journeys undertaken by Paul. The first is sponsored by the church at Antioch (13:1–14:28). Since Paul worked in Antioch prior to undertaking the independent missionary efforts reflected in his letters (Galatians 2:1–14), some scholars think that Luke may have employed sources from Antioch. Paul and Barnabas follow the established pattern. They preach in synagogues until hostility forces them to turn to the Gentiles (13:44–52).

Paul's missionary activities also involve dramatic encounters with representatives of pagan religion (14:8–18; 16:16–19; 19:23–41). These tales illustrate the religious and moral superiority of Christianity. Preaching the gospel challenges magicians, false prophets and advocates of other cults who enrich themselves by exploiting superstition. However, Luke does not depict the apostles as entirely successful. Hostility undermines their effectiveness and leads to imprisonment or expulsion (14:2, 19–20; 16:19–40; 19:28–20:1). These episodes have been carefully crafted to show the reader that accusations against the apostles are groundless.

Charges are brought by persons of inferior status, who show no concern for civic order. At Lystra, Jews from other cities stir up the crowds to stone Paul (14:19–20). In Ephesus officials rescue Paul. The town clerk warns the
populace against civic disturbances (19:35-41). Historical details of the legal proceedings in Philippi (16:19-40) continue to draw considerable attention (see White, 'Visualizing the “Real” World of Acts'). Paul’s appeal to his citizenship (16:36-40) only after the indignities of beating and being chained in prison has led some to doubt his citizenship. However, historical examples in which individuals found their rights ignored by provincial governors can be adduced. Luke’s use of the Roman citizenship motif plays an important role in establishing Paul’s status relative to his accusers wherever it occurs. Paul can compel the magistrates to make a public apology and politely conduct his party out of the city. Later Paul’s inherited citizenship makes him superior to the Roman tribune, Lysias, who was about to examine Paul under torture (22:22-9). When plots in Jerusalem endanger Paul’s life, the tribune sends him to the Roman governor in Caesarea with an extensive escort (23:23-30). God’s plan for Paul to witness in Rome (23:11) is fulfilled because Paul appeals to his citizen rights (25:9-12; 26:30-2). Throughout the concluding imprisonments, Paul is treated as a prominent person, held under relaxed confinement and permitted to speak before officials and visiting dignitaries, and to receive visitors.

The social dynamics of these scenes illustrate the class-consciousness and xenophobia of Greco-Roman cities. The town clerk in Ephesus asserts that Paul has not threatened the goddess Artemis or her temple. Instead Demetrius and the artisans who rile the crowd are endangering their city by acting outside proper legal channels (19:38-40). Paul is a person of social prominence whose life is threatened by those of inferior education and status. This narrative positioning of the apostle is illustrated by the converts who provide him hospitality as well. Heads of household, first a Greek woman from Asia (16:15) and then a Roman man (16:33-4) host Paul and his entourage at banquets. They represent the social status of those who are converted by the apostle’s preaching. Why emphasize the social status of Paul’s converts? The Christian mission has powerful patrons whose hospitality establishes the social context for the new movement within their respective cities (17:5-9). The concluding scene has Paul repeat this pattern in Rome, itself. Permitted ‘house arrest’ characteristic of a prominent citizen, Paul can assemble local Jewish leaders for one final appeal (28:17-28). When they reject God’s messenger, the apostle turns to the Gentiles for the final time. Though prophecies have indicated that Paul will be martyred (20:22-4, 38; 21:10-14), Luke leaves his readers with a different picture. The apostle has sufficient resources to set up a school for instruction in his own domicile (28:30-1). Combined with the testimony of the unbelieving Jewish leaders
that no one had sent formal charges against Paul from Jerusalem (28:21), readers can only conclude that there is no case against the apostle.

CONCLUSION

This analysis of Acts might serve to describe the Synoptic Gospels as well. They seek to make the case for faith in Jesus of Nazareth as Son of God, the agent of God’s saving power for all people. Readers interested in tracking down the many details of the first-century social, political and religious world that can be detected in the Gospel narratives should refer to commentaries. Whatever the narrative conventions employed by the evangelists, the Gospels remain rooted in their own time and place. They are not romantic fiction or myths of a founding age. To treat them as such negates the fundamental claim that God has once again come into the world of humanity to call forth a people from among the nations. Further, this gathering of the elect represents the decisive coming of God. It cannot be revoked. God’s next manifestation marks the end of the world.

Insights from contemporary narrative criticism have opened the way to appreciate the distinctive features of each evangelist. This chapter has highlighted features of such interpretation that are accessible to readers of an English version of the Bible. The evangelists are authors, not record-keepers. This awareness needs to be set against a tendency of readers new to the Gospels to treat the Gospels as though they were accounts from a local paper about what happened. Preachers often move from text to sermon in a way that reinforces that viewpoint, taking every Gospel reading as an account of ‘what Jesus did’. Little attention is paid to the evangelist in question, the place of the particular story in the Gospel or its difference from other versions. If the gospels were merely records or reports, that would be normal. We always build up our understanding of a news event by piecing together interviews from different sources. But even there, the point of view of the person speaking matters. Consequently, reading the Gospels and Acts as narrative should lead one to appreciate their individuality. It should not erase their confessional perspective, since the claims they support are religious in character, not merely literary.
Further reading


