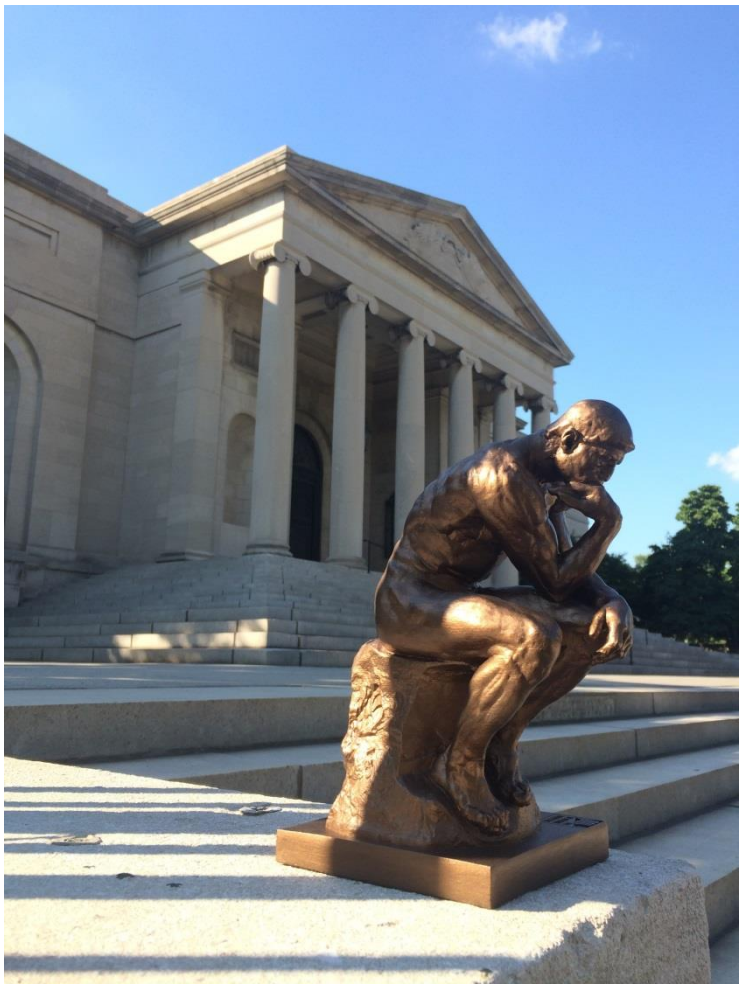
St Thomas More Catholic Academy & Sixth Form College

A Level Religious Studies Introduction Booklet



Course information

The full course title is 'OCR A Level Religious Studies (H573)' it is comprised of three separate units:

- H573/01 Philosophy of Religion
- H573/02 Religious Ethics
- H573/03 Developments in Christian thought

The syllabus

Everything you need to know about the course can be found in the syllabus. You will be given a copy of the syllabus but a full PDF copy can be downloaded at:
http://www.ocr.org.uk/Images/242913-specification-accredited-a-level-gce-religious-studies-h573.pdf

How the course is assessed

The exam for each component represents 33.3% of the total marks for the A Level. These exams will take the form of an externally assessed written papers lasting 2 hours each and testing both AO1 and AO2.

Each paper will contain four essay questions, with the student choosing three out of the four to answer

In class, you will receive short (c.40 min) essay-style assessments as well as being set longer research essays (c. 1500 words). Each will be marked according to the following criteria:

AO1 Demonstrate Knowledge and Understanding (40% of total marks)

- Select and demonstrate clearly relevant knowledge and understanding through the use of evidence, examples and correct language and terminology appropriate to the course of study. In addition, for synoptic assessment, A Level candidates should demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the connections between different elements of their course of study.

AO2 Analysis, Evaluation and Application (60% of total marks)

- Critically evaluate and justify a point of view through the use of evidence and reasoned argument. In addition, for synoptic assessment, A Level candidates should relate elements of their course of study to their broader context and to aspects of human experience.

See the mark scheme for the precise success criteria. All feedback will be in line with the school's policy. Students will also have individual tutorial sessions throughout the year to help them improve.

Resources

Resources from lessons, help with home learning and other guidance can be found on GoogleClassroom.

Text Books

Whilst we already provide course notes, many students like to buy text books to supplement their learning. The core textbooks that we will use are:

- Chris Eyre, Julian Waterfield and Karen Dean, OCR A Level Religious Studies (3 books – Religion and Ethics, Developments in Christian Thought and Philosophy of Religion)
- Chris Eyre and Julian Waterfield **my revision notes: OCR A Level Religious Studies** (3 books – Religion and Ethics, Developments in Christian Thought and Philosophy of Religion).
- Libby Ahluwalia and Robert Bowie Oxford, **A Level Religious Studies for OCR** (2 books – Year 1 and 2)
- Michael B. Wilkinson, Michael Wilcockson, Hugh N.Campbell, **OCR Religious Studies A Level** (2 books – Year 1 and 2)
- **Peped** There are a number of useful revision guides available at: http://peped.org/philosophicalinvestigations/shop/ Look for the ones marked as OCR New Spec. There is loads of free stuff on this website as well. Peped also has a youtube channel.
- Libby Ahluwalia **Oxford A Level Religious Studies for OCR Revision Guide**
- Greg Dewar AS and A Level Religious Studies: Philosophy & Ethics Through Diagrams. Designed for the old course but a good supplement to any text book.

How the course is delivered

The course is delivered through nine one hour lessons per fortnight equally split between the three areas of Philosophy of Religion, Religious Ethics and Developments in Christian Thought.

Departmental expectations

From day one, we expect students to take responsibility for their own preparation for lessons. This will involve background reading on specific issues, producing notes or essays and taking a full part in the lessons. Students will be provided with a book for note taking but students will need to have a folder to collate all their notes. This should be kept up to date and organised, ideally using file dividers. These should be brought in every lesson but can on occasion be left in the cupboard in SSR1.

When work is set, you are expected to complete it within the timeframe. If you should miss a deadline, you will initially be interviewed by your teacher after arranging the new submission date. If you should persistently fail to complete the work set, your place on the course will be discussed. Attendance issues will be dealt with using the standard STM pastoral model but persistent failure to attend lessons will put your place on the course in question.

More than anything, we expect our students to have a positive attitude to their work, themselves and the school.

Any problems or queries contact: gray.p@st-thomas-more.net.

Introductory work

All of these tasks will contribute to your year 12 baseline assessment
Bring your completed work with you to your first lesson

Religious Ethics

1. Learn the key words and their definitions (below). You will be tested on these.

   - Deontology: from the Greek for duty – a duty based approach to ethics. I.e. doing your duty. Exemplified by Kantian Ethics and the Categorical Imperative
   - Teleology: from the Greek for ends/purpose – an approach to ethics to ethics that looks long term and focuses on the purpose of life. Exemplified by Aristotelian Virtue Ethics and a striving for Eudaimonia (contentment/happiness).
   - Consequentialism: a consequence based approach to ethics where the focus is on the immediate outcome being for the benefit of the majority. Exemplified by Utilitarian thinking: 'the greatest good for the greatest number'.
   - Absolutism: ethics/morality/rules that apply in all places and times - they do not change in any circumstance
   - Objective: ethics/morality/rules that take into consideration the bigger picture
   - Relativism: ethics/morality/rules that changes depending on the time or place.
   - Subjective: ethics/morality/rules that vary from person to person or only take one individual's attitude into consideration

2. A side of parchment (one side of A4 at least), on what you would do in this situation and why.

A fiendish, SAW-style madman has kidnapped a group of people, including yourself and taken you to a large disused barn. Alongside one wall of the barn are crates of explosives. You happen to be a world class cricketer (masquerading as an A level student) and the kidnapper has fastened one of your legs to a stump in front of the explosives. To your right he binds a group of popular comedians, to your left he ties up four women at various stages of pregnancy, and straight ahead of you he chains four of the world's leading researchers into cancer and AIDS. Everyone is gagged so no one can speak to you. In front of you is an automatic bowling machine. Before leaving, the kidnapper hands you a cricket bat and tells you that in 30 minutes the bowling machine will deliver a ball – the ball contains a grenade. If you do not hit the ball it will strike the explosives behind you and everyone will die, or you can decide where to hit the ball and thus, who will be killed.

There are ONLY four possible options – you are not Indiana Jones or James Bond or MacGyver and so cannot find a way to stop the machine or save everyone. So what do you do?

a) Hit the ball right killing the comedians who bring laughter and joy to millions?
b) Hit the ball left killing the mothers to be, their unborn children and those potential lives?
c) Hit the ball straight ahead killing the scientists who could cure two of the world's great illnesses?
d) Allow the grenade to hit the explosives, thus killing everyone?

Take your time with this and clearly explain which groups you would save and why, and therefore which group you would choose to kill. Make your argument detailed and convincing. There is no obvious right answer so make sure you explain your thinking.

3. Read the following text and summarise the two sections:

A Word to the Student: Why Study Moral Philosophy?

Ethics, or moral philosophy, is one branch of philosophy. What is philosophy? It is an enterprise that begins with wonder at the marvels and mysteries of the world, that pursues a rational investigation of those marvels and mysteries, seeking wisdom and truth, and that results in a life lived in passionate moral and intellectual integrity. Believing that "the unexamined life is not worth living," philosophy leaves no facet of life untouched by its inquiry. It aims for a clear, critical, comprehensive conception of reality.

The hallmark of philosophy is rational argument. Philosophers clarify concepts and analyze and test propositions and beliefs, but their major task is to analyze and construct arguments. Philosophical reasoning is closely allied with scientific reasoning, in that both build hypotheses and look for evidence to test those hypotheses with the hope of coming closer to the truth. However, scientific experiments take place in laboratories and have testing procedures to record objective or empirically verifiable results. The laboratory of the philosopher is the domain of ideas—the mind, where imaginative thought-experiments take place; the study, where ideas are written down and examined; and wherever conversation or debate about the perennial questions takes place, where thesis and counterexample and counterthesis are considered.

Let us apply this to ethics. Ethics is that branch of philosophy that deals with how we ought to live, with the idea of the Good, and with such concepts as "right" and "wrong." As such, it is a *practical* discipline. There are two parts

to the study of ethics: the theoretical and the applied. The theoretical aspect, "ethical theory," deals with comprehensive theories about the good life and moral obligation. It analyzes and constructs grand systems of thought in order to explain and orient agents to the moral life. Included in this domain is a close analysis of concepts such as "right," "wrong," "permissible," and the like. The applied aspect, "applied ethics," deals with moral problems, including questions about the morality of abortion, premarital sex, capital punishment, euthanasia, and civil disobedience. Ethical theory and applied ethics are closely related: theory without application is sterile and useless, but action without a theoretical perspective is blind. There will be an enormous difference in the quality of discussions about abortion, punishment, sexual morality, and euthanasia when those discussions are informed by ethical theory as compared to when they are not. More light and less heat will be the likely outcome.

With the onset of pluralism and the loss of confidence in traditional authorities, a rational approach to ethics is vital for us to survive and thrive. Ethical theory may rid us of facile dogmatism and emotionalism—where shouting matches replace arguments—and liberate us from what Bernard Williams refers to as "vulgar relativism." Ethical theory clarifies relevant concepts, constructs and evaluates arguments, and guides us in living our lives. It is important that the educated person be able to discuss ethical situations with precision and subtlety.

Ethics is not only of instrumental value; it is valuable in its own right. It is satisfying to have knowledge of important matters for its own sake, and it is important to understand the nature and scope of moral theory for its own sake. We are rational beings who cannot help but want to understand the nature of the good life and all that it implies. You may become disturbed by the variety of theories discussed in this book, which seem mutually exclusive and so produce confusion when you desire guidance. But an appreciation of the complexity of ethics is valuable in offsetting our tendency toward dogmatism and provincialism. It is also a challenge to use your reason to endorse or produce the best system or combination of systems possible.

I have written this book as a quest for truth and understanding, hoping to create excitement about the value of ethics. It is a subject that I love, for it is about how we are to live, about the best kind of life. I hope that you will come to share my enthusiasm for the subject and to develop your own ideas in the process.

I would be delighted to hear your thoughts or questions on the ideas in this book, including any suggestions for ways to improve the work. Feel free to write to me at the following address:

Louis P. Pojman, Department of English and Philosophy
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Introduction

What Is Ethics?

We are discussing no small matter, but how we ought to live.

SOCRATES, IN PLATO'S *REPUBLIC*

Some years ago, the nation was stunned by a report from Kew Gardens, Queens, in New York City. A young woman, Kitty Genovese, was brutally stabbed in her neighborhood late at night during three separate attacks while thirty-eight respectable, law-abiding citizens watched and listened. Her neighbors looked on from their bedroom windows for some thirty-five minutes as the assailant beat her, stabbed her, left her, and returned to repeat the attack two more times until she died. No one lifted a phone to call the police; no one shouted at the criminal, let alone went to Genovese's aid. Finally, a seventy-year-old woman called the police. It took them two minutes to arrive, but by that time Genovese was dead. Only one other woman came out to testify before the ambulance came, which was an hour later. Then residents from the whole neighborhood poured out of their apartments. When asked why they hadn't done anything, they gave answers ranging from "I don't know" and "I was tired" to "Frankly, we were afraid."[1]

Who are our neighbors? What should these respectable citizens have done? What would you have done? If, with little inconvenience to yourself, you could save someone's life or save someone from harm, would you be

partly responsible for any harm done to that person if you chose not to act? Are such acts of omission morally blameworthy? How much risk should we undergo to help someone in danger? What kinds of generalizations can we make from this episode about contemporary culture in America? What does the crime rate in our cities tell us about the moral climate of our society? Is the Genovese murder an anomaly, or is it quite indicative of a deeply disturbing trend?

What is it to be a moral person? What is the nature of morality? Why do we need morality? What function does it play? What is the good, and how will I know it? Are moral principles absolute, or are they simply relative to social groups or individual decision? Is morality, like beauty, in the eye of the beholder? Is it always in my interest to be moral? Or is it sometimes in my best interest to act immorally? How do we justify our moral beliefs? What is the basis of morality? Which ethical theory best justifies and explains the moral life? What relationship does morality have with religion, law, and etiquette?

These are some of the questions that we will be looking at in this book. We want to understand the foundation and structure of morality. We want to know how we should live.

The terms *moral* and *ethics* come from Latin and Greek, respectively (*mores* and *ethos*), deriving their meaning from the idea of "custom." Although philosophers sometimes use these terms interchangeably, many philosophers distinguish among *morality, moral philosophy,* and *ethics.* I generally use *morality* to refer to certain customs, precepts, and practices of people and cultures. This is sometimes called *positive morality* or *descriptive morality* (since it describes actual beliefs and customs). I use *moral philosophy* to refer to philosophical or theoretical reflection on morality. Specific moral theories issuing from such philosophical reflection I call *ethical theories,* in line with a common practice. I use *ethics* to refer to the whole domain of morality and moral philosophy, since these two areas have many features in common. For example, both areas concern values, virtues, and principles and practices, though in different ways.

Moral philosophy refers to the systematic endeavor to understand moral concepts and justify moral principles and theories. It undertakes to analyze such concepts as "right," "wrong," "permissible," "ought," "good," and "evil" in their moral contexts. Moral philosophy seeks to establish principles of right behavior that may serve as action guides for individuals and groups. It investigates which values and virtues are paramount to a worthwhile life or society. It builds and scrutinizes arguments in ethical theories and seeks to discover valid principles (e.g., "Never kill innocent human beings") and the relationship between valid principles (e.g., "Does saving a life in some situations constitute a valid reason for breaking a promise?").

Philosophy of Religion

1. Learn the key words and their definitions (below). You will be tested on these.

    - Premise – a statement which forms the basis of an argument
    - Rationalism – human reason is the source of all knowledge and truth
    - Empiricism – all knowledge and truth are derived from the senses, experience and observation
    - Epistemology – the study of knowledge
    - A posteriori – a philosophical position based upon experience and observation. Knowledge follows experience
    - A priori – a philosophical position that relies upon logic and reason. Knowledge is prior to experience
    - Materialism – the belief that there is only one substance which make up the human person – body
    - Dualism – the belief that there are two substances which make up the human person – body and soul
    - Fallacy – an error in reasoning

2. Does God exist?
   One side of parchment giving your opinion and why you believe this to be the case. Back up your argument with logic and reasoning. By all means consider the alternative point of view and critique it.

3. Research the following people and bring in a brief summary of their life and works:

    - Socrates
    - Plato
    - Aristotle
    - Anselm
    - Aquinas

Developments in Christian Thought

THIS WORK WILL ASSIST YOU IN YOUR BASELINE ASSESSMENT AT THE START OF YEAR 12. PLEASE BRING IT WITH YOU TO OUR FIRST LESSON TOGETHER IN THE AUTUMN TERM

1. Read the article 12.1 The Person of Christ. Make notes on the information to familiarise yourself with the life and work of Jesus Christ. You may also wish to watch films such as the Miracle Maker, Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus Christ Superstar, or The Passion of the Christ (but be warned – this one has graphic scenes of the crucifixion) to help you get a secure understanding of the life of Jesus.

2. Do some research on whether Jesus was simply a human being or whether he was divine (the Son of God). You may choose to use the following links:
   https://peped.org/philosophicalinvestigations/christian-thought/jesus-christ/
   https://eitheroressays.com/category/the-person-of-jesus-christ/
   http://www.philosopherkings.co.uk/Thepersonofchrist.html

3. Now, copy the following table and fill it in with any more ideas you may have:

Evidence for Jesus being divine (the Son of God)	Evidence for Jesus being simply a human being (not divine or the Son of God)
The Gospels suggest he has divine powers e.g. knowing what people are thinking (when Jesus heals the paralysed man for instance)	*Maybe the Gospel writers are not using historical evidence, but are writing a faith story where they have edited the information to suit their purpose.*

12.1 : The Person of Christ (transition reading)

Jesus (c. 4 BC – c. AD 30 / 33), also referred to as Jesus of Nazareth and Jesus Christ, was a first-century Jewish preacher and religious leader. He is the central figure of Christianity. Most Christians believe he is the incarnation of God the Son and the awaited Messiah (Christ) prophesied in the Old Testament.

Virtually all modern scholars of antiquity agree that Jesus existed historically, although the quest for the historical Jesus has produced little agreement on the historical reliability of the Gospels and on how closely the Jesus portrayed in the Bible reflects the historical Jesus. Jesus was a Galilean Jew who was baptized by John the Baptist and subsequently began his own ministry, preaching his message orally and often being referred to as "rabbi". Jesus debated with fellow Jews on how to best follow God, engaged in healings, taught in parables and gathered followers. He was arrested and tried by the Jewish authorities, turned over to the Roman government, and was subsequently crucified on the order of Pontius Pilate, the Roman prefect. After his death, his followers believed he rose from the dead, and the community they formed eventually became the early Church.

Christian doctrines include the beliefs that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, was born of a virgin named Mary, performed miracles, founded the Church, died by crucifixion as a sacrifice to achieve atonement, rose from the dead, and ascended into Heaven, from where he will return. Most Christians believe Jesus enables people to be reconciled to God. The Nicene Creed asserts that Jesus will judge the living and the dead either before or after their bodily resurrection, an event tied to the Second Coming of Jesus in Christian eschatology. The great majority of Christians worship Jesus as the incarnation of God the Son, the second of three persons of the Trinity.

The Name of Jesus

The name Jesus is derived from the Latin Iesus, a transliteration of the Greek Ἰησοῦς (Iesous). The Greek form is a rendering of the Hebrew ישוע (Yeshua), a variant of the earlier name יהושע (Yehoshua), or in English, "Joshua". The name Yeshua appears to have been in use in Judea at the time of the birth of Jesus. The 1st-century works of historian Flavius Josephus, who wrote in Koine Greek, the same language as that of the New Testament, refer to at least twenty different people with the name Jesus (i.e. Ἰησοῦς). The etymology of Jesus' name in the context of the New Testament is generally given as "Yahweh is salvation".
Since early Christianity, Christians have commonly referred to Jesus as "Jesus Christ". The word Christ was a title or office ("the Christ"), not a given name. It derives from the Greek Χριστός (Christos), a translation of the Hebrew mashiakh (משיח) meaning "anointed", and is usually transliterated into English as "Messiah". In biblical Judaism, sacred oil was used to anoint certain exceptionally holy people and objects as part of their religious investiture (see Leviticus 8:10–12 and Exodus 30:29).

Christians of the time designated Jesus as "the Christ" because they believed him to be the Messiah, whose arrival is prophesied in the Hebrew Bible and Old Testament. In postbiblical usage, Christ became viewed as a name—one part of "Jesus Christ". The term "Christian" (meaning a follower of Christ) has been in use since the 1st century.

Canonical gospels

The four canonical gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) are the foremost sources for the life and message of Jesus. However, other parts of the New Testament also include references to key episodes in his life, such as the Last Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:23. Acts of the Apostles (Acts 10:37–38 and Acts 19) refers to the early ministry of Jesus and its anticipation by John the Baptist. Acts 1:1–11 says more about the Ascension of Jesus (also mentioned in 1 Timothy 3:16) than the canonical gospels do. In the undisputed Pauline letters, which were written earlier than the gospels, the words or instructions of Jesus are cited several times (1 Corinthians 7:10–11, 9:14, 11:23–25, 2 Corinthians 12:9).

Some early Christian groups had separate descriptions of the life and teachings of Jesus that are not included in the New Testament. These include the Gospel of Thomas, Gospel of Peter, and Gospel of Judas, the Apocryphon of James, and many other apocryphal writings. Most scholars conclude that these are written much later and are less reliable accounts than the canonical gospels.

The canonical gospels are four accounts, each written by a different author. The authors of the gospels are all anonymous, attributed by tradition to the four evangelists, each with close ties to Jesus: Mark by John Mark, an associate of Peter; Matthew by one of Jesus' disciples; Luke by a companion of Paul mentioned in a few epistles; and John by another of Jesus' disciples, the "beloved disciple".

One important aspect of the study of the gospels is the literary genre under which they fall. Genre "is a key convention guiding both the composition and the interpretation of writings".Whether the gospel authors set out to write novels, myths, histories, or biographies has a tremendous impact on how they ought to be interpreted. Some recent studies suggest that the genre of the gospels ought to be situated within the realm of ancient biography. Although not without critics, the position that the gospels are a type of ancient biography is the consensus among scholars today.

Not everything contained in the New Testament gospels is considered to be historically reliable. Views range from their being inerrant descriptions of the life of Jesus to their providing little historical information about his life beyond the basics. According to a broad scholarly consensus, the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), and not John, are the most reliable sources of information about Jesus.

According to the Marcan priority, the first to be written was the Gospel of Mark (written AD 60–75), followed by the Gospel of Matthew (AD 65–85), the Gospel of Luke (AD 65–95), and the Gospel of John (AD 75–100). Furthermore, most scholars agree that the authors of Matthew and Luke used Mark as a source when writing their gospels. Matthew and Luke also share some content not found in Mark. To explain this, many scholars believe that in addition to Mark, another source (commonly called the "Q source") was used by the two authors.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke are known as the Synoptic Gospels, from the Greek σύν (syn "together") and ὄψις (opsis "view"). They are similar in content, narrative arrangement, language and paragraph structure. Scholars generally agree that it is impossible to find any direct literary relationship between the Synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of John. While the flow of some events (such as Jesus' baptism, transfiguration, crucifixion and interactions with the apostles) are shared among the Synoptic Gospels, incidents such as the transfiguration do not appear in John, which also differs on other matters, such as the Cleansing of the Temple.

The Synoptics emphasize different aspects of Jesus. In Mark, Jesus is the Son of God whose mighty works demonstrate the presence of God's Kingdom. He is a tireless wonder worker, the servant of both God and man.[99] This short gospel records few of Jesus' words or teachings. The Gospel of Matthew emphasizes that Jesus is the fulfilment of God's will as revealed in the Old Testament, and he is the Lord of the Church. He is the "Son of David", a "king", and the Messiah. Luke presents Jesus as the divine-human saviour who shows compassion to the needy. He is the friend of sinners and outcasts, come to seek and save the lost. This gospel includes Jesus' most beloved parables, such as the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son.

The prologue to the Gospel of John identifies Jesus as an incarnation of the divine Word (Logos). As the Word, Jesus was eternally present with God, active in all creation, and the source of humanity's moral and spiritual

nature. Jesus is not only greater than any past human prophet but greater than any prophet could be. He not only speaks God's Word; he is God's Word. In the Gospel of John, Jesus reveals his divine role publicly. Here he is the Bread of Life, the Light of the World, the True Vine and more.

In general, the authors of the New Testament showed little interest in an absolute chronology of Jesus or in synchronizing the episodes of his life with the secular history of the age. As stated in John 21:25, the gospels do not claim to provide an exhaustive list of the events in the life of Jesus. The accounts were primarily written as theological documents in the context of early Christianity, with timelines as a secondary consideration. In this respect, it is noteworthy that the Gospels devote about one third of their text to the last week of the life of Jesus in Jerusalem, referred to as the Passion. Although the gospels do not provide enough details to satisfy the demands of modern historians regarding exact dates, it is possible to draw from them a general picture of the life story of Jesus.

Genealogy and nativity

Jesus was Jewish, born by Mary, wife of Joseph (Matthew 1, Luke 2). The Gospels of Matthew and Luke offer two accounts of the genealogy of Jesus. Matthew traces Jesus' ancestry to Abraham through David. Luke traces Jesus' ancestry through Adam to God. The lists are identical between Abraham and David, but differ radically from that point. Matthew has twenty-seven generations from David to Joseph, whereas Luke has forty-two, with almost no overlap between the names on the two lists. Various theories have been put forward seeking to explain why the two genealogies are so different.

Matthew and Luke each describe Jesus' nativity (or birth), especially that Jesus was born by a virgin Mary in Bethlehem in fulfilment of prophecy. Luke's account emphasizes events before the birth of Jesus and centres on Mary, while Matthew's mostly covers those after the birth and centres on Joseph. Both accounts state that Jesus was born to Joseph and Mary, his betrothed, in Bethlehem, and both support the doctrine of the virgin birth of Jesus, according to which Jesus was miraculously conceived by the Holy Spirit in Mary's womb when she was still a virgin. At the same time, there is evidence, at least in the Lukan Acts of the Apostles, that Jesus was thought to have had, like many figures in antiquity, a dual paternity, since there it is stated he descended from the seed or loins of David.

In Matthew, Joseph is troubled because Mary, his betrothed, is pregnant (Matthew 1:19–20), but in the first of Joseph's three dreams an angel assures him not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife, because her child was conceived by the Holy Spirit. In Matthew 2:1–12, wise men or Magi from the East bring gifts to the young Jesus as the King of the Jews. Herod the Great hears of Jesus' birth and, wanting him killed, orders the murders of male infants in Bethlehem. But an angel warns Joseph in his second dream, and the family flees to Egypt—later to return and settle in Nazareth.

In Luke 1:31–38, Mary learns from the angel Gabriel that she will conceive and bear a child called Jesus through the action of the Holy Spirit. When Mary is due to give birth, she and Joseph travel from Nazareth to Joseph's ancestral home in Bethlehem to register in the census ordered by Caesar Augustus. While there Mary gives birth to Jesus, and as they have found no room in the inn, she places the newborn in a manger (Luke 2:1–7). An angel announces the birth to some shepherds, who go to Bethlehem to see Jesus, and subsequently spread the news abroad (Luke 2:8–20). After the presentation of Jesus at the Temple, Joseph, Mary and Jesus return to Nazareth.

Early life, family, and profession

Jesus' childhood home is identified in the gospels of Luke and Matthew as the town of Nazareth in Galilee, where he lived with his family. Although Joseph appears in descriptions of Jesus' childhood, no mention is made of him thereafter. His other family members—his mother, Mary, his brothers James, Joses (or Joseph), Judas and Simon and his unnamed sisters—are mentioned in the gospels and other sources.

The Gospel of Mark reports that Jesus comes into conflict with his neighbours and family. Jesus' mother and brothers come to get him (Mark 3:31–35) because people are saying that he is crazy (Mark 3:21). Jesus responds that his followers are his true family. In John, Mary follows Jesus to his crucifixion, and he expresses concern over her well-being (John 19:25–27).

When Jesus is presented as a baby in the temple per Jewish Law, a man named Simeon says to Mary and Joseph that Jesus "shall stand as a sign of contradiction, while a sword will pierce your own soul. Then the secret thoughts of many will come to light" (Luke 2:28–35). Several years later, when Jesus goes missing on a visit to Jerusalem, his parents find him in the temple sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking questions, and the people are amazed at his understanding and answers; Mary scolds Jesus for going missing, to which Jesus replies that he must "be in his father's house" (Luke 2:41–52).

Baptism and temptation

The Synoptic accounts of Jesus' baptism are all preceded by information about John the Baptist. They show John preaching penance and repentance for the remission of sins and encouraging the giving of alms to the poor (Luke 3:11) as he baptizes people in the area of the Jordan River around Perea and foretells (Luke 3:16) the arrival of someone "more powerful" than he. Later, Jesus identifies John as "the Elijah who was to come" (Matthew 11:14, Mark 9:13–14), the prophet who was expected to arrive before the "great and terrible day of the Lord" (Malachi 4:5). Likewise, Luke says that John had the spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1:17).

In Mark, John baptizes Jesus, and as he comes out of the water he sees the Holy Spirit descending to him like a dove and he hears a voice from heaven declaring him to be God's Son (Mark 1:9–11). This is one of two events described in the gospels where a voice from Heaven calls Jesus "Son", the other being the Transfiguration. The spirit then drives him into the wilderness where he is tempted by Satan (Mark 1:12–13). Jesus then begins his ministry after John's arrest (Mark 1:14). Jesus' baptism in Matthew is similar. Here, before Jesus' baptism, John protests, saying, "I need to be baptized by you" (Matthew 3:14). Jesus instructs him to carry on with the baptism "to fulfil all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15). Matthew also details the three temptations that Satan offers Jesus in the wilderness (Matthew 4:3–11). In Luke, the Holy Spirit descends as a dove after everyone has been baptized and Jesus is praying (Luke 3:21–22). John implicitly recognizes Jesus from prison after sending his followers to ask about him (Luke 7:18–23). Jesus' baptism and temptation serve as preparation for his public ministry.

The Gospel of John leaves out Jesus' baptism and temptation. Here, John the Baptist testifies that he saw the Spirit descend on Jesus (John 1:32). John publicly proclaims Jesus as the sacrificial Lamb of God, and some of John's followers become disciples of Jesus. In this Gospel, John denies that he is Elijah (John 1:21). Before John is imprisoned, Jesus leads his followers to baptize disciples as well (John 3:22–24), and they baptize more people than John (John 4:1).

Public ministry

The Synoptics depict two distinct geographical settings in Jesus' ministry. The first takes place north of Judea, in Galilee, where Jesus conducts a successful ministry; and the second shows Jesus rejected and killed when he travels to Jerusalem. Often referred to as "rabbi", Jesus preaches his message orally. Notably, Jesus forbids those who recognize him as the Messiah to speak of it, including people he heals and demons he exorcises (see Messianic Secret).

John depicts Jesus' ministry as largely taking place in and around Jerusalem, rather than in Galilee; and Jesus' divine identity is openly proclaimed and immediately recognized.

Scholars divide the ministry of Jesus into several stages. The Galilean ministry begins when Jesus returns to Galilee from the Judaean Desert after rebuffing the temptation of Satan. Jesus preaches around Galilee, and in Matthew 4:18–20, his first disciples, who will eventually form the core of the early Church, encounter him and begin to travel with him. This period includes the Sermon on the Mount, one of Jesus' major discourses, as well as the calming of the storm, the feeding of the 5,000, walking on water and a number of other miracles and parables. It ends with the Confession of Peter and the Transfiguration.

As Jesus travels towards Jerusalem, in the Perean ministry, he returns to the area where he was baptized, about a third of the way down from the Sea of Galilee along the Jordan River (John 10:40–42). The final ministry in Jerusalem begins with Jesus' triumphal entry into the city on Palm Sunday. In the Synoptic Gospels, during that week Jesus drives the money changers from the Second Temple and Judas bargains to betray him. This period culminates in the Last Supper and the Farewell Discourse.

Disciples and followers

Near the beginning of his ministry, Jesus appoints twelve apostles. In Matthew and Mark, despite Jesus only briefly requesting that they join him, Jesus' first four apostles, who were fishermen, are described as immediately consenting, and abandoning their nets and boats to do so (Matthew 4:18–22, Mark 1:16–20). In John, Jesus' first two apostles were disciples of John the Baptist. The Baptist sees Jesus and calls him the Lamb of God; the two hear this and follow Jesus. In addition to the Twelve Apostles, the opening of the passage of the Sermon on the Plain identifies a much larger group of people as disciples (Luke 6:17). Also, in Luke 10:1–16 Jesus sends seventy or seventy-two of his followers in pairs to prepare towns for his prospective visit. They are instructed to accept hospitality, heal the sick and spread the word that the Kingdom of God is coming.

In Mark, the disciples are notably obtuse. They fail to understand Jesus' miracles (Mark 4:35–41, Mark 6:52), his parables (Mark 4:13), or what "rising from the dead" would mean (Mark 9:9–10). When Jesus is later arrested, they desert him.

Teachings and miracles

In the Synoptics, Jesus teaches extensively, often in parables, about the Kingdom of God (or, in Matthew, the Kingdom of Heaven). The Kingdom is described as both imminent (Mark 1:15) and already present in the ministry of Jesus (Luke 17:21). Jesus promises inclusion in the Kingdom for those who accept his message (Mark 10:13–27). Jesus talks of the "Son of Man," an apocalyptic figure who would come to gather the chosen.

Jesus calls people to repent their sins and to devote themselves completely to God. Jesus tells his followers to adhere to Jewish law, although he is perceived by some to have broken the law himself, for example regarding the Sabbath. When asked what the greatest commandment is, Jesus replies: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind ... And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Matthew 22:37–39). Other ethical teachings of Jesus include loving your enemies, refraining from hatred and lust, turning the other cheek, and forgiving people who have sinned against you (Matthew 5–7).

John's Gospel presents the teachings of Jesus not merely as his own preaching, but as divine revelation. John the Baptist, for example, states in John 3:34: "He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure." In John 7:16 Jesus says, "My teaching is not mine but his who sent me." He asserts the same thing in John 14:10: "Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works."

Approximately thirty parables form about one third of Jesus' recorded teachings. The parables appear within longer sermons and at other places in the narrative. They often contain symbolism, and usually relate the physical world to the spiritual. Common themes in these tales include the kindness and generosity of God and the perils of transgression. Some of his parables, such as the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11–32), are relatively simple, while others, such as the Growing Seed (Mark 4:26–29), are sophisticated, profound and abstruse. When asked by his disciples about why he speaks in parables to the people, Jesus replies that the chosen disciples have been given to "know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven", unlike the rest of their people, "For the one who has will be given more and he will have in abundance. But the one who does not have will be deprived even more.", going on to say that the majority of their generation have grown "dull hearts" and thus are unable to understand (Matthew 13:10–17).

In the gospel accounts, Jesus devotes a large portion of his ministry performing miracles, especially healings. The miracles can be classified into two main categories: healing miracles and nature miracles. The healing miracles include cures for physical ailments, exorcisms, and resurrections of the dead. The nature miracles show Jesus' power over nature, and include turning water into wine, walking on water, and calming a storm, among others. Jesus states that his miracles are from a divine source. When Jesus' opponents suddenly accuse him of performing exorcisms by the power of Beelzebul, the prince of demons, Jesus counters that he

performs them by the "Spirit of God" (Matthew 12:28) or "finger of God", arguing that all logic suggests that Satan would not let his demons assist the Children of God because it would divide Satan's house and bring his kingdom to desolation; furthermore, he asks his opponents that if he exorcises by Beel'zebub, "by whom do your sons cast them out?"(Luke 11:20). In Matthew 12:31–32, he goes on to say that while all manner of sin, "even insults against God" or "insults against the son of man", shall be forgiven, whoever insults goodness (or "The Holy Spirit") shall never be forgiven; he/she carries the guilt of his/her sin forever.

In John, Jesus' miracles are described as "signs", performed to prove his mission and divinity. However, in the Synoptics, when asked by some teachers of the Law and some Pharisees to give miraculous signs to prove his authority, Jesus refuses, saying that no sign shall come to corrupt and evil people except the sign of the prophet Jonah. Also, in the Synoptic Gospels, the crowds regularly respond to Jesus' miracles with awe and press on him to heal their sick. In John's Gospel, Jesus is presented as unpressured by the crowds, who often respond to his miracles with trust and faith. One characteristic shared among all miracles of Jesus in the gospel accounts is that he performed them freely and never requested or accepted any form of payment. The gospel episodes that include descriptions of the miracles of Jesus also often include teachings, and the miracles themselves involve an element of teaching. Many of the miracles teach the importance of faith. In the cleansing of ten lepers and the raising of Jairus' daughter, for instance, the beneficiaries are told that their healing was due to their faith.

Proclamation as Christ and Transfiguration

At about the middle of each of the three Synoptic Gospels are two significant events: the Confession of Peter and the Transfiguration of Jesus. These two events are not mentioned in the Gospel of John.
In his Confession, Peter tells Jesus, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus affirms that Peter's confession is divinely revealed truth. After the confession, Jesus tells his disciples about his upcoming death and resurrection (Matthew 16:21, Mark 8:31, Luke 9:22)

In the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1–9, Mark 9:2–8, and Luke 9:28–36),[132][133][142] Jesus takes Peter and two other apostles up an unnamed mountain, where "he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white." A bright cloud appears around them, and a voice from the cloud says, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him" (Matthew 17:1–9).

Passion Week

Main article: Passion Week
The description of the last week of the life of Jesus (often called Passion Week) occupies about one third of the narrative in the canonical gospels, starting with Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem and ending with his Crucifixion.

In the Synoptics, the last week in Jerusalem is the conclusion of the journey through Perea and Judea that Jesus began in Galilee. Jesus rides a young donkey into Jerusalem, reflecting the tale of the Messiah's Donkey, an oracle from the Book of Zechariah in which the Jews' humble king enters Jerusalem this way (Zechariah 9:9). People along the way lay cloaks and small branches of trees (known as palm fronds) in front of him and sing part of Psalms 118:25–26.

Jesus next expels the money changers from the Second Temple, accusing them of turning it into a den of thieves through their commercial activities. Jesus then prophesies about the coming destruction, including false prophets, wars, earthquakes, celestial disorders, persecution of the faithful, the appearance of an "abomination of desolation," and unendurable tribulations (Mark 13:1–23). The mysterious "Son of Man," he says, will dispatch angels to gather the faithful from all parts of the earth (Mark 13:24–27). Jesus warns that these wonders will occur in the lifetimes of the hearers (Mark 13:28–32).[137] In John, the Cleansing of the Temple occurs at the beginning of Jesus' ministry instead of at the end (John 2:13–16).
Jesus comes into conflict with the Jewish elders, such as when they question his authority and when he criticizes them and calls them hypocrites. Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve apostles, secretly strikes a bargain with the Jewish elders, agreeing to betray Jesus to them for 30 silver coins.

The Gospel of John recounts of two other feasts in which Jesus taught in Jerusalem before the Passion Week (John 7:1–10:42).[123] In Bethany, a village near Jerusalem, Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead. This potent sign increases the tension with authorities, who conspire to kill him (John 11).[123] Mary of Bethany anoints Jesus' feet, foreshadowing his entombment. Jesus then makes his Messianic entry into Jerusalem. The cheering crowds greeting Jesus as he enters Jerusalem add to the animosity between him and the establishment. In John, Jesus has already cleansed the Second Temple during an earlier Passover visit to Jerusalem. John next recounts Jesus' Last Supper with his disciples.

Last Supper

The Last Supper is the final meal that Jesus shares with his 12 apostles in Jerusalem before his crucifixion. The Last Supper is mentioned in all four canonical gospels; Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians (11:23–26) also refers to it. During the meal, Jesus predicts that one of his apostles will betray him. Despite each Apostle's assertion that he would not betray him, Jesus reiterates that the betrayer would be one of those present. Matthew 26:23–25 and John 13:26–27 specifically identify Judas as the traitor.

In the Synoptics, Jesus takes bread, breaks it, and gives it to the disciples, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you". He then has them all drink from a cup, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:19–20). The Christian sacrament or ordinance of the Eucharist is based on these events. Although the Gospel of John does not include a description of the bread-and-wine ritual during the Last Supper, most scholars agree that John 6:22–59 (the Bread of Life Discourse) has a eucharistic character and resonates with the institution narratives in the Synoptic Gospels and in the Pauline writings on the Last Supper.

In all four gospels, Jesus predicts that Peter will deny knowledge of him three times before the rooster crows the next morning. In Luke and John, the prediction is made during the Supper (Luke 22:34, John 22:34). In Matthew and Mark, the prediction is made after the Supper; Jesus also predicts that all his disciples will desert him (Matthew 26:31–34, Mark 14:27–30). The Gospel of John provides the only account of Jesus washing his disciples' feet after the meal. John also includes a long sermon by Jesus, preparing his disciples (now without Judas) for his departure. Chapters 14–17 of the Gospel of John are known as the Farewell Discourse and are a significant source of Christological content.

Agony in the Garden, betrayal, and arrest

In the Synoptics, Jesus and his disciples go to the garden Gethsemane, where Jesus prays to be spared his coming ordeal. Then Judas comes with an armed mob, sent by the chief priests, scribes and elders. He kisses Jesus to identify him to the crowd, which then arrests Jesus. In an attempt to stop them, an unnamed disciple of Jesus uses a sword to cut off the ear of a man in the crowd. After Jesus' arrest, his disciples go into hiding, and Peter, when questioned, thrice denies knowing Jesus. After the third denial, Peter hears the rooster crow and recalls Jesus' prediction about his denial. Peter then weeps bitterly.

In John (18:1–11), Jesus does not pray to be spared his crucifixion, as the gospel portrays him as scarcely touched by such human weakness. The people who arrest him are Roman soldiers and Temple guards. Instead of being betrayed by a kiss, Jesus proclaims his identity, and when he does, the soldiers and officers fall to the ground. The gospel identifies Peter as the disciple who used the sword, and Jesus rebukes him for it.

Trials by the Sanhedrin, Herod, and Pilate

After his arrest, Jesus is taken to the Sanhedrin, a Jewish judicial body.[200] The gospel accounts differ on the details of the trials. In Matthew 26:57, Mark 14:53 and Luke 22:54, Jesus is taken to the house of the high priest, Caiaphas, where he is mocked and beaten that night. Early the next morning, the chief priests and scribes lead Jesus away into their council. John 18:12–14 states that Jesus is first taken to Annas, Caiaphas' father-in-law, and then to the high priest.

During the trials Jesus speaks very little, mounts no defence, and gives very infrequent and indirect answers to the priests' questions, prompting an officer to slap him. In Matthew 26:62 Jesus' unresponsiveness leads Caiaphas to ask him, "Have you no answer?" In Mark 14:61 the high priest then asks Jesus, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" Jesus replies, "I am", and then predicts the coming of the Son of Man. This provokes Caiaphas to tear his own robe in anger and to accuse Jesus of blasphemy. In Matthew and Luke, Jesus' answer is more ambiguous: in Matthew 26:64 he responds, "You have said so", and in Luke 22:70 he says, "You say that I am".

The Jewish elders take Jesus to Pilate's Court and ask the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, to judge and condemn Jesus, accusing him of claiming to be the King of the Jews. The use of the word "king" is central to the discussion between Jesus and Pilate. In John 18:36 Jesus states, "My kingdom is not from this world", but he does not unequivocally deny being the King of the Jews. In Luke 23:7–15 Pilate realizes that Jesus is a Galilean, and thus comes under the jurisdiction of Herod Antipas, the Tetrarch of Galilee and Perea. Pilate sends Jesus to Herod to be tried, but Jesus says almost nothing in response to Herod's questions. Herod and his soldiers mock Jesus, put an expensive robe on him to make him look like a king, and return him to Pilate, who then calls together the Jewish elders and announces that he has "not found this man guilty". Preserving a Passover custom of the time, Pilate allows one prisoner chosen by the crowd to be released. He gives the people a choice between Jesus and a murderer called Barabbas (בר-אבא or Bar-abbâ, "son of the father", from the common given name Abba: 'father'). Persuaded by the elders (Matthew 27:20), the mob chooses to release Barabbas and crucify Jesus. Pilate writes a sign in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek that reads "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews" (abbreviated as INRI in depictions) to be affixed to Jesus' cross (John 19:19–20), then scourges Jesus and sends him to be crucified. The soldiers place a Crown of Thorns on Jesus' head and ridicule him as the King of the Jews. They beat and taunt him before taking him to Calvary, also called Golgotha, for crucifixion.

Crucifixion and entombment

Jesus' crucifixion is described in all four canonical gospels. After the trials, Jesus is led to Calvary carrying his cross; the route traditionally thought to have been taken is known as the Via Dolorosa. The three Synoptic Gospels indicate that Simon of Cyrene assists him, having been compelled by the Romans to do so. In Luke 23:27–28 Jesus tells the women in the multitude of people following him not to weep for him but for themselves and their children. At Calvary, Jesus is offered a concoction usually offered as a painkiller. According to Matthew and Mark, he refuses it.

The soldiers then crucify Jesus and cast lots for his clothes. Above Jesus' head on the cross is Pilate's inscription, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." Soldiers and passersby mock him about it. Two convicted thieves are crucified along with Jesus. In Matthew and Mark, both thieves mock Jesus. In Luke, one of them rebukes Jesus, while the other defends him. Jesus tells the latter: "today you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). In John, Mary, the mother of Jesus, and the beloved disciple were at the crucifixion. Jesus tells the beloved disciple to take care of his mother (John 19:26–27).

The Roman soldiers break the two thieves' legs (a procedure designed to hasten death in a crucifixion), but they do not break those of Jesus, as he is already dead (John 19:33). In John 19:34, one soldier pierces Jesus' side with a lance, and blood and water flow out. In the Synoptics, when Jesus dies, the heavy curtain at the Temple is torn. In Matthew 27:51–54, an earthquake breaks open tombs. In Matthew and Mark, terrified by the events, a Roman centurion states that Jesus was the Son of God.

On the same day, Joseph of Arimathea, with Pilate's permission and with Nicodemus' help, removes Jesus' body from the cross, wraps him in a clean cloth, and buries him in his new rock-hewn tomb. In Matthew 27:62–66, on the following day the chief Jewish priests ask Pilate for the tomb to be secured, and with Pilate's permission the priests place seals on the large stone covering the entrance.

Resurrection and Ascension

Mary Magdalene (alone in John, but accompanied by other women in the Synoptics) goes to Jesus' tomb on Sunday morning and is surprised to find it empty. Despite Jesus' teaching, the disciples had not understood that Jesus would rise again.

In Matthew, there are guards at the tomb. An angel descends from heaven, and opens the tomb. The guards faint from fear. Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene and "the other Mary" after they visited the tomb. Jesus then appears to the eleven remaining disciples in Galilee and commissions them to baptize all nations in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

In Mark, Salome and Mary, mother of James are with Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:1). In the tomb, a young man in a white robe (an angel) tells them that Jesus will meet his disciples in Galilee, as he had told them (referring to Mark 14:28).

In Luke, Mary and various other women meet two angels at the tomb, but the eleven disciples do not believe their story (Luke 25:1–12). Jesus appears to two of his followers in Emmaus. He also makes an appearance to Peter. Jesus then appears that same day to his disciples in Jerusalem (Luke 24:13–43). Although he appears and vanishes mysteriously, he also eats and lets them touch him to prove that he is not a spirit. He repeats his command to bring his teaching to all nations (Luke 24:51).[225]

In John, Mary is alone at first, but Peter and the beloved disciple come and see the tomb as well. Jesus then appears to Mary at the tomb. He later appears to the disciples, breathes on them, and gives them the power to forgive and retain sins. In a second visit to disciples, he proves to a doubting disciple ("Doubting Thomas") that he is flesh and blood. The disciples return to Galilee, where Jesus makes another appearance. He performs a miracle known as the catch of 153 fish at the Sea of Galilee, after which Jesus encourages Peter to serve his followers.

Jesus' ascension into Heaven is described in Luke 24:50–53, Acts 1:1–11 and mentioned in 1 Timothy 3:16. In the Acts of the Apostles, forty days after the Resurrection, as the disciples look on, "he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight". 1 Peter 3:22 states that Jesus has "gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God".

The Acts of the Apostles describes several appearances of Jesus after his Ascension. In Acts 7:55, Stephen gazes into heaven and sees "Jesus standing at the right hand of God" just before his death. On the road to Damascus, the Apostle Paul is converted to Christianity after seeing a blinding light and hearing a voice saying, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" (Acts 9:5). In Acts 9:10–18, Jesus instructs Ananias of Damascus in a vision to heal Paul. The Book of Revelation includes a revelation from Jesus concerning the last days.

Early Christianity

After Jesus's life, his followers, as described in the first chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, were all Jews either by birth or conversion, for which the biblical term "proselyte" is used, and referred to by historians as Jewish Christians. The early Gospel message was spread orally, probably in Aramaic, but almost immediately also in Greek. The New Testament's Acts of the Apostles and Epistle to the Galatians record that the first Christian community was centred in Jerusalem and its leaders included Peter, James, the brother of Jesus, and John the Apostle.

After the conversion of Paul the Apostle, he claimed the title of "Apostle to the Gentiles". Paul's influence on Christian thinking is said to be more significant than that of any other New Testament author. By the end of the 1st century, Christianity began to be recognized internally and externally as a separate religion from Judaism which itself was refined and developed further in the centuries after the destruction of the Second Temple.

Numerous quotations in the New Testament and other Christian writings of the first centuries, indicate that early Christians generally used and revered the Hebrew Bible (the Tanakh) as religious text, mostly in the Greek (Septuagint) or Aramaic (Targum) translations.

Early Christians wrote many religious works, including the ones included in the canon of the New Testament. The canonical texts, which have become the main sources used by historians to try to understand the historical Jesus and sacred texts within Christianity, were probably written between 50 and 120 AD.

Historical views

Prior to the Enlightenment, the gospels were usually regarded as accurate historical accounts, but since then scholars have emerged who question the reliability of the gospels and draw a distinction between the Jesus described in the gospels and the Jesus of history, Since the 18th century, three separate scholarly quests for the historical Jesus have taken place, each with distinct characteristics and based on different research criteria, which were often developed during the quest that applied them. While there is widespread scholarly agreement on the existence of Jesus, and a basic consensus on the general outline of his life, the portraits of Jesus constructed by various scholars often differ from each other, and from the image portrayed in the gospel accounts.

Approaches to the historical reconstruction of the life of Jesus have varied from the "maximalist" approaches of the 19th century, in which the gospel accounts were accepted as reliable evidence wherever it is possible, to the "minimalist" approaches of the early 20th century, where hardly anything about Jesus was accepted as historical. In the 1950s, as the second quest for the historical Jesus gathered pace, the minimalist approaches faded away, and in the 21st century, minimalists such as Price are a very small minority. Although a belief in the inerrancy of the gospels cannot be supported historically, many scholars since the 1980s have held that, beyond the few facts considered to be historically certain, certain other elements of Jesus' life are "historically probable". Modern scholarly research on the historical Jesus thus focuses on identifying the most probable elements.

Sources

New Testament scholars face a formidable challenge when they analyse the canonical Gospels. The Gospels are not biographies in the modern sense, and the authors explain Jesus' theological significance and recount his public ministry while omitting many details of his life. The reports of supernatural events associated with Jesus' death and resurrection make the challenge even more difficult. Scholars regard the gospels as compromised sources of information because the writers were trying to glorify Jesus. Even so, the sources for Jesus' life are better than sources scholars have for the life of Alexander the Great. Scholars use a number of criteria, such as the criterion of independent attestation, the criterion of coherence, and the criterion of discontinuity to judge the historicity of events. The historicity of an event also depends on the reliability of the source; indeed, the gospels are not independent nor consistent records of Jesus' life. Mark, which is most likely the earliest written gospel, has been considered for many decades the most historically accurate. John, the latest written gospel, differs considerably from the Synoptic Gospels, and thus is generally considered less reliable, although more and more scholars now also recognize that it may contain a core of older material as historically valuable as the Synoptic tradition or even more so.

The non-canonical Gospel of Thomas might be an independent witness to many of Jesus' parables and aphorisms. For example, Thomas confirms that Jesus blessed the poor and that this saying circulated independently before being combined with similar sayings in the Q source. Other select non-canonical Christian texts may also have value for historical Jesus research.

Early non-Christian sources that attest to the historical existence of Jesus include the works of the historians Josephus and Tacitus. Josephus scholar Louis Feldman has stated that "few have doubted the genuineness" of Josephus' reference to Jesus in book 20 of the Antiquities of the Jews, and it is disputed only by a small number of scholars. Tacitus referred to Christ and his execution by Pilate in book 15 of his work Annals. Scholars generally consider Tacitus's reference to the execution of Jesus to be both authentic and of historical value as an independent Roman source.

Non-Christian sources are valuable in two ways. First, they show that even neutral or hostile parties never evince any doubt that Jesus actually existed. Second, they present a rough picture of Jesus that is compatible with that found in the Christian sources: that Jesus was a teacher, had a reputation as a miracle worker, had a brother James, and died a violent death.

Chronology

Jesus was a Galilean Jew, born around the beginning of the 1st century, who died in 30 or 33 AD in Judea. The general scholarly consensus is that Jesus was a contemporary of John the Baptist and was crucified by the Roman governor Pontius Pilate, who held office from 26 to 36 AD.

The gospels offer several clues concerning the year of Jesus' birth. Matthew 2:1 associates the birth of Jesus with the reign of Herod the Great, who died around 4 BC, and Luke 1:5 mentions that Herod was on the throne shortly before the birth of Jesus, although this gospel also associates the birth with the Census of Quirinius which took place ten years later. Luke 3:23 states that Jesus was "about thirty years old" at the start of his ministry, which according to Acts 10:37–38 was preceded by John the Baptist's ministry, itself recorded in Luke 3:1–2 to have begun in the 15th year of Tiberius' reign (28 or 29 AD). By collating the gospel accounts with historical data and using various other methods, most scholars arrive at a date of birth from 6 to 4 BC for Jesus, but some propose estimates that lie in a wider range.
A number of approaches have been used to estimate the year of the crucifixion of Jesus. Most scholars agree that he died in 30 or 33 AD. The gospels state that the event occurred during the prefecture of Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea from 26 to 36 AD. The date for the conversion of Paul (estimated to be 33–36 AD) acts as an upper bound for the date of Crucifixion. The dates for Paul's conversion and ministry can be determined by analysing the Pauline epistles and the Acts of the Apostles. Astronomers have tried to estimate the precise date of the Crucifixion by analysing lunar motion and calculating historic dates of Passover, a festival based on the lunisolar Hebrew calendar. The most widely accepted dates derived from this method are April 7, 30 AD, and April 3, 33 AD (both Julian).

HISTORICITY OF EVENTS?

Family of Jesus

Many scholars agree that Joseph, Jesus' father, died by the time Jesus began his ministry. Joseph is not mentioned at all in the gospels during Jesus' ministry. Joseph's death would explain why in Mark 6:3, Jesus' neighbours refer to Jesus as the "son of Mary" (sons were usually identified by their fathers).

According to Theissen and Merz, it is common for extraordinary charismatic leaders, such as Jesus, to come into conflict with their ordinary families. In Mark, Jesus' family comes to get him, fearing that he is mad (Mark 3:20–34), and this account is likely historical because early Christians would not have invented it. After Jesus' death, many members of his family joined the Christian movement Jesus' brother James became a leader of the Jerusalem Church.

Géza Vermes says that the doctrine of the virgin birth of Jesus arose from theological development rather than from historical events. Despite the widely held view that the authors of the Synoptic Gospels drew upon each other (the so-called synoptic problem), other scholars take it as significant that the virgin birth is attested by two separate gospels, Matthew and Luke.

According to E. P. Sanders, the birth narratives in Matthew and Luke are the clearest case of invention in the Gospel narratives of Jesus' life. Both accounts have Jesus born in Bethlehem, in accordance with Jewish salvation history, and both have him growing up in Nazareth. But Sanders points that the two Gospels report completely different and irreconcilable explanations for how that happened. Luke's account of a census in which everyone returned to their ancestral cities is not plausible. Matthew's account is more plausible, but the story reads as though it was invented to identify Jesus as like a new Moses, and the historian Josephus reports Herod the Great's brutality without ever mentioning that he massacred little boys.

Sanders says that the genealogies of Jesus are based not on historical information but on the authors' desire to show that Jesus was the universal Jewish saviour. In any event, once the doctrine of the virgin birth of Jesus became established, that tradition superseded the earlier tradition that he was descended from David through Joseph. Luke reports that Jesus was a blood relation of John the Baptist, but scholars generally consider this connection to be invented.

Baptism

Most modern scholars consider Jesus' baptism to be a definite historical fact, along with his crucifixion. Theologian James D. G. Dunn states that they "command almost universal assent" and "rank so high on the 'almost impossible to doubt or deny' scale of historical facts" that they are often the starting points for the study of the historical Jesus. Scholars adduce the criterion of embarrassment, saying that early Christians would not have invented a baptism that might imply that Jesus committed sins and wanted to repent. According to Theissen and Merz, Jesus was inspired by John the Baptist and took over from him many elements of his teaching.

Ministry in Galilee

Most scholars hold that Jesus lived in Galilee and Judea and did not preach or study elsewhere. They agree that Jesus debated with Jewish authorities on the subject of God, performed some healings, taught in parables and gathered followers. Jesus' Jewish critics considered his ministry to be scandalous because he feasted with sinners, fraternized with women, and allowed his followers to pluck grain on the Sabbath. According to Sanders, it is not plausible that disagreements over how to interpret the Law of Moses and the Sabbath would have led Jewish authorities to want Jesus killed.

According to Ehrman, Jesus taught that a coming kingdom was everyone's proper focus, not anything in this life. He taught about the Jewish Law, seeking its true meaning, sometimes in opposition to other traditions. Jesus put love at the centre of the Law, and following that Law was an apocalyptic necessity. His ethical teachings called for forgiveness, not judging others, loving enemies, and caring for the poor. Funk and Hoover note that typical of Jesus were paradoxical or surprising turns of phrase, such as advising one, when struck on the cheek, to offer the other cheek to be struck as well (Luke 6:29).

The Gospels portray Jesus teaching in well-defined sessions, such as Matthew's Sermon on the Mount or Luke's parallel Sermon on the Plain. According to Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, these teaching sessions include authentic teachings of Jesus, but the scenes were invented by the respective evangelists to frame these teachings, which had originally been recorded without context. While Jesus' miracles fit within the social context of antiquity, he defined them differently. First, he attributed them to the faith of those healed. Second, he connected them to end times prophecy.

Jesus chose twelve disciples (the "Twelve"), evidently as an apocalyptic message. All three Synoptics mention the Twelve, although the names on Luke's list vary from those in Mark and Matthew, suggesting that Christians were not certain who all the disciples were. The 12 disciples might have represented the twelve original tribes of Israel, which would be restored once God's rule was instituted. The disciples were reportedly meant to be the rulers of the tribes in the coming Kingdom (Matthew 19:28, Luke 22:30). According to Bart Ehrman, Jesus' promise that the Twelve would rule is historical, because the Twelve included Judas Iscariot. In Ehrman's view, no Christians would have invented a line from Jesus, promising rulership to the disciple who betrayed him. In Mark, the disciples play hardly any role other than a negative one. While others sometimes respond to Jesus with complete faith, his disciples are puzzled and doubtful. They serve as a foil to Jesus and to other characters. The failings of the disciples are probably exaggerated in Mark, and the disciples make a better showing in Matthew and Luke.

Sanders says that Jesus' mission was not about repentance, although he acknowledges that this opinion is unpopular. He argues that repentance appears as a strong theme only in Luke, that repentance was John the Baptist's message, and that Jesus' ministry would not have been scandalous if the sinners he ate with had been repentant. According to Theissen and Merz, Jesus taught that God was generously giving people an opportunity to repent.

Role

Jesus taught that an apocalyptic figure, the "Son of Man", would soon come on clouds of glory to gather the elect, or chosen ones (Mark 13:24–27, Matthew 24:29–31, Luke 21:25–28). He referred to himself as a "son of man" in the colloquial sense of "a person", but scholars do not know whether he also meant himself when

he referred to the heavenly "Son of Man". Paul the Apostle and other early Christians interpreted the "Son of Man" as the risen Jesus.

The title Christ, or Messiah, indicates that Jesus' followers believed him to be the anointed heir of King David, whom some Jews expected to save Israel. The Gospels refer to him not only as a Messiah but in the absolute form as "the Messiah" or, equivalently, "the Christ". In early Judaism, this absolute form of the title is not found, but only phrases such as "his Messiah". The tradition is ambiguous enough to leave room for debate as to whether Jesus defined his eschatological role as that of the Messiah. The Jewish messianic tradition included many different forms, some of them focused on a Messiah figure and others not. Based on the Christian tradition, Gerd Theissen advances the hypothesis that Jesus saw himself in messianic terms but did not claim the title "Messiah". Bart Ehrman argues that Jesus did consider himself to be the Messiah, albeit in the sense that he would be the king of the new political order that God would usher in, not in the sense that most people today think of the term.

Passover and crucifixion in Jerusalem

Around AD 30, Jesus and his followers travelled from Galilee to Jerusalem to observe Passover. Jesus caused a disturbance in the Second Temple, which was the centre of Jewish religious and civil authority. Sanders associates it with Jesus' prophecy that the Temple would be totally demolished. Jesus had a last meal with his disciples, which is the origin of the Christian sacrament of bread and wine. Jesus' words are recorded in the Synoptics and in Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians. The differences in the accounts cannot be completely reconciled, and it is impossible to know what Jesus intended, but in general the meal seems to point forward to the coming Kingdom. Jesus probably expected to be killed, and he may have hoped that God would intervene.

The Gospels say that Jesus was betrayed to the authorities by a disciple, and many scholars consider this report to be highly reliable. He was executed on the orders of Pontius Pilate, the Roman prefect of Judaea. Pilate most likely saw Jesus' reference to the Kingdom of God as a threat to Roman authority and worked with the Temple elites to have Jesus executed. The Sadducean high-priestly leaders of the Temple more plausibly had Jesus executed for political reasons than for his teaching. They may have regarded him as a threat to stability, especially after he caused a disturbance at the Second Temple. Other factors, such as Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, may have contributed to this decision. Most scholars consider Jesus' crucifixion to be factual, because early Christians would not have invented the painful death of their leader.

After crucifixion

After Jesus' death, his followers said he rose from the dead, although exact details of their experiences are unclear. According to Sanders, the Gospel reports contradict each other, which, according to him, suggests competition among those claiming to have seen him first rather than deliberate fraud. On the other hand, L. Michael White suggests that inconsistencies in the Gospels reflect differences in the agendas of their unknown authors. The followers of Jesus formed a community to wait for his return and the founding of his kingdom.

Portraits of Jesus

Modern research on the historical Jesus has not led to a unified picture of the historical figure, partly because of the variety of academic traditions represented by the scholars. Given the scarcity of historical sources, it is generally difficult for any scholar to construct a portrait of Jesus that can be considered historically valid beyond the basic elements of his life. The portraits of Jesus constructed in these quests often differ from each other, and from the image portrayed in the gospels.

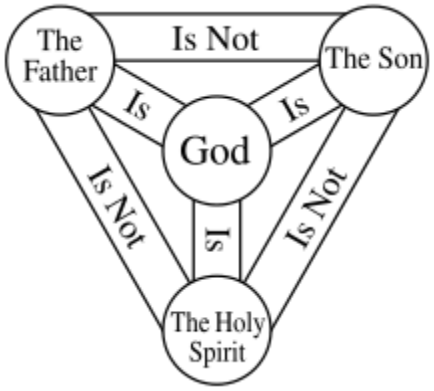
Jesus is seen as the founder of, in the words of Sanders, a '"renewal movement within Judaism." One of the criteria used to discern historical details in the "third quest" is the criterion of plausibility, relative to Jesus' Jewish context and to his influence on Christianity. A disagreement in contemporary research is whether Jesus was apocalyptic. Most scholars conclude that he was an apocalyptic preacher, like John the Baptist and Paul the Apostle. In contrast, certain prominent North American scholars, such as Burton Mack and John Dominic Crossan, advocate for a non-eschatological Jesus, one who is more of a Cynic sage than an

apocalyptic preacher. In addition to portraying Jesus as an apocalyptic prophet, a charismatic healer or a cynic philosopher, some scholars portray him as the true Messiah or an egalitarian prophet of social change. However, the attributes described in the portraits sometimes overlap, and scholars who differ on some attributes sometimes agree on others.

Since the 18th century, scholars have occasionally put forth that Jesus was a political national messiah, but the evidence for this portrait is negligible. Likewise, the proposal that Jesus was a Zealot does not fit with the earliest strata of the Synoptic tradition.

Christian ideas about Jesus today

The Trinity is the belief in Christianity that God is one God in three persons: God the Father, God the Son (Jesus), and God the Holy Spirit.



Jesus is the central figure of Christianity. Although Christian views of Jesus vary, it is possible to summarize the key beliefs shared among major denominations, as stated in their catechetical or confessional texts. Christian views of Jesus are derived from various sources, including the canonical gospels and New Testament letters such as the Pauline epistles and the Johannine writings. These documents outline the key beliefs held by Christians about Jesus, including his divinity, humanity, and earthly life, and that he is the Christ and the Son of God. Despite their many shared beliefs, not all Christian denominations agree on all doctrines, and both major and minor differences on teachings and beliefs have persisted throughout Christianity for centuries.

The New Testament states that the resurrection of Jesus is the foundation of the Christian faith (1 Corinthians 15:12–20). Christians believe that through his sacrificial death and resurrection, humans can be reconciled with God and are thereby offered salvation and the promise of eternal life. Recalling the words of John the Baptist on the day after Jesus' baptism, these doctrines sometimes refer to Jesus as the Lamb of God, who was crucified to fulfil his role as the servant of God. Jesus is thus seen as the new and last Adam, whose obedience contrasts with Adam's disobedience. Christians view Jesus as a role model, whose God-focused life believers are encouraged to imitate.

Most Christians believe that Jesus was both human and the Son of God. While there has been theological debate over his nature, Trinitarian Christians generally believe that Jesus is the Logos, God's incarnation and God the Son, both fully divine and fully human.