

Jesus, Genre, and Tradition in the Gospels of Matthew and of Thomas
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- I. What is a gospel?
 - A. Oral/written “good news”: first and second century
 - B. What kind of “good news” do Matthew and Thomas present?
- II. What kind of figure is Jesus in Matthew and Thomas?
 - A. The significance of titles and the Tanakh
 - B. Sayings about the “Kingdom”
 - C. Models: Moses and the prophets; the Wisdom of God
- III. What audiences and interests do these works assume and construct?

Gospel (trans. Greek, *evangelion*): “good news”

Synoptic: from the Greek for “seen together” - refers to Matthew, Mark, and Luke in NT

Apocalypse: from the Greek for “an uncovering, revelation, disclosure”

Eschatology: teaching about the end of things (from the Greek *logos; eschatos*, “furthest”)

A. Kingdom [of God]: “a new state of affairs, a definitive outpouring and sending of powers of deliverance and salvation, a restitution of mankind, a fulfillment of the world or the beginning of the fulfillment... a realm or a community.” Malina, 147.

B. Justin Martyr (d. 165 CE) was the first to refer to “gospels” in the plural, meaning literary texts rather than oral proclamation....After the middle of the second century, the singular noun *evangelion* often refers to a written gospel.... Christian authors through the fifth century pinned the “gospel” label to nearly fifty compositions.... To the ancient Christians, “gospels” were Jesus literature, that is, compositions which contained accounts of the words and/or actions of Jesus...[in contrast to] acts of apostles, apocalypses, acts of martyrs, letters, and sermons or homilies. Aune, 18

C. The Gospel of Matthew ... is very much a “church book,” written specifically to meet the needs of the church as a developing organization...The evangelist “Matthew” reveals himself to be a man who stands in the tradition of the Hellenistic Jewish Christian mission. He has a deep concern for the mission of the church to the world at large. The climax of his gospel is the scene of the Great Commission, where the risen Jesus commands his disciples to “make disciples of all nations.” Nevertheless, there is no doubt that his concern tends to focus on the mission of the church to the Jews. Moreover, in developing his own understanding of the Christian faith, he is in constant dialogue with what is going on in Judaism at the same time. Perrin, 169.

D. To say that Matthew, because he accords Jesus such a high status, is not Jewish but Christian, in his teaching about Jesus, anachronistically imposes on the late first century the clear identity that most Christians created for themselves during the second century, often in contrast to Judaism. To say that Matthew’s emphasis on Jesus as Son of God is incompatible with Judaism is to ignore the varieties of Judaism current in the first century. Granted the apocalyptic, mystical, political, sectarian, revivalist, and reformist movements within Palestinian and diaspora Judaism in the first century, Matthew’s Christology makes claims that fit within the broad parameters of Judaism as it actually existed. Matthew did not claim for Jesus divinity in the way that Greek Christian theologians two centuries later did....Jesus is understood in his relationship with the God of Israel, known in the Bible, and in the experience of the community. Though Matthew’s narrative would later be used to support ontological theories of the Son’s relationship to the Father, Matthew remains firmly in the orbit of Judaism. Saldarini, 193.

E. “These are the secret sayings which the living Jesus spoke and which Didymos Judas Thomas wrote down.”-- Thomas

“An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham.” -
- Matthew 1:1

“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” -- Mark 1.1

“Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished by us, ... it seemed good to me also, ... to write an orderly account for you.”--Luke 1:1-4

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”
--John 1:1.

F. “By encountering the ‘living Jesus,’ as Thomas suggests, one may come to recognize oneself and Jesus, as, so to speak, identical twins.” Pagels, 57.

G. In Deuteronomy, Moses uses the phrase to refer to God “speaking out of fire” in the revelation at Sinai (“For who is there of all flesh who has heard the voice of the living God speaking out of fire, as we have, and remained alive?”) (Deut 5:26). For Jeremiah, the phrase is a metaphor for God: “My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and dug out cisterns for themselves, cracked cisterns that can hold no water” (Jeremiah 2:13). Zechariah uses the phrase to describe the apocalyptic end of days: On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem...And the Lord will become king over all the earth; on that day the lord will be one and his name one” (Zech 14:8-9).

H. Moses writes that the man who practices the righteousness which is based on the law shall live by it. But the righteousness based on faith says, Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’ (that is, to bring Christ down) or ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart (that is, the word of faith which we preach) because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. Romans 10:5-10.

I. ...What does it mean to “fast from the world”? ... The Thomas Christian is imbued with a knowledge that elevates him or her above the world, beyond its effects (Thom 111). But though the Gospel of Thomas may speak of a kind of superiority, even of revulsion of the Thomas Christian toward the world, in reality the world is still present, and still a problem, challenging in every minute his or her claim to be above its influence. ... In the Gospel of Thomas the world is portrayed as a threat, and the hearer is exhorted always to be aware of the danger. But how does this intersection of *theologica* and *realia* translate into actual behavior? Patterson, 127-128.

J. The closest that *GosThom* comes to fulfilling any of the usual categories for a definition of Gnosticism is in its teaching that salvation comes through knowing one’s true identity. ...Jesus insists on the need to look inward and outward (in creation) to achieve enlightenment, not upward toward the world of light. *GosThom* understands Jesus’ redemptive role to be that of a teacher who shows the way to others....the light is within and it shines within the world itself. Jesus himself takes a role akin to the figure of Jewish Wisdom, descended to call her children to their created purpose. King, 197.

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