

THE GOSPELS

Although they have been called “biographies” they are different from other biographies:

- there is little information about Jesus’ parents or his childhood
- there is not much information about influences on his life
- there is a “disproportionate” emphasis on his trial and crucifixion
- They are written with a purpose explicitly different from other biographies
- *We are to find ourselves in the text*

We will come back to these last two points.

What you probably already know about the Gospels:

- Mark's Gospel was probably based on Peter's recollections of Jesus.
- Mark ends abruptly ("they were afraid").
- There is a longer ending to Mark, probably added later.
- Mark is probably the earliest to be written.
- There is a lot of overlap between the 3 "synoptic" (seen from the same point of view) Gospels.
- Matthew and Luke make use of a lot of the same material as Mark, with other material as well.
- Luke includes a prologue, explaining why he wrote it. He probably did commit his gospel to writing.
- Luke is the only Gospel which narrates what we think of as the "Christmas story."
- Luke is the only Gospel with the Parable of the Good Samaritan, the Parable of the Prodigal Son.
- John is different from the others, both in content and in style.
- John explains why he selected what he did (John 20:30-31).
- John's Gospel is built around 7 "signs" and 7 "I am" sayings.
- Events are not necessarily told in the same order in the four Gospels. The Gospels are not constructed strictly chronologically.
- The longest section in all four is the narration of his trial, crucifixion and resurrection.
- All the Gospels contain more than just "stories about Jesus."
What "more"?

What have I left out?

Some background information

- They are “the Gospel *according to x*” and may not have been committed to paper (papyrus) by the Evangelist.
- There was no copyright in antiquity (!), and copying was not thought of as unethical.
- What is “Scripture” in my Bible originally circulated orally.
- Many of the stories in the Gospels come in short sections, or “pericopes,” and we are accustomed to reading them separately and in isolation.
- No “original version” of any part of the New Testament is still extant.
- The manuscripts (MSS) were extensively copied and circulated.
- Scraps of papyrus containing small portions of the NT have been found in the sands of Egypt. The oldest of these, the so-called “Rylands papyrus” probably dates to the early part of the 2nd century B.C. Go to “Rylands papyrus” and “Chester Beatty papyrus” on Google.
- The earliest actual MS of the complete NT we have is the “Codex Sinaiticus,” which is 4th century. The story of how the Codex Sinaiticus was discovered is fascinating. There's a good website, codexsinaiticus.org.

Constantin von Tischendorf

Here is the testimony of Tischendorf himself: (1844)

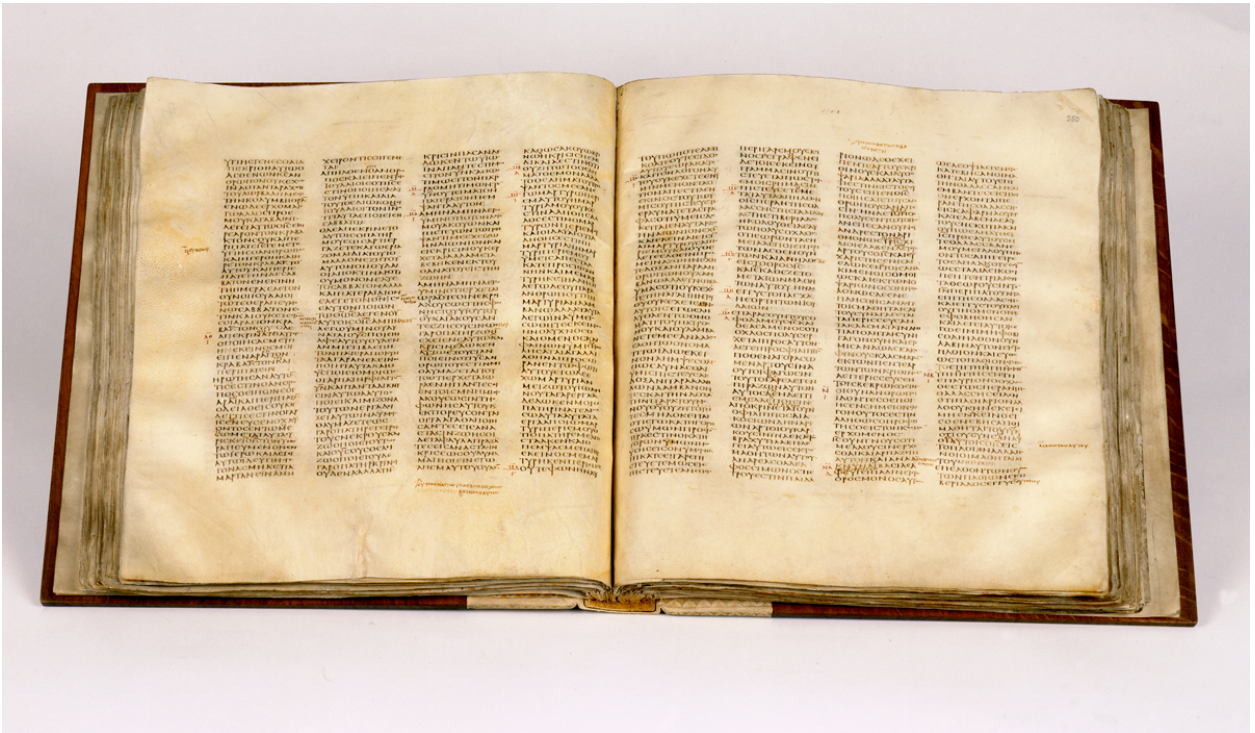
"I perceived in the middle of the great hall a large and wide basket, full of old parchments; and the librarian informed me that two heaps of papers like this, mouldered by reason of age, had been already committed to the flames. What was my surprise to find among this heap of documents a considerable number of sheets of a copy of the Old Testament in Greek, which seemed to me to be one of the most ancient I had ever seen."

"The monks allowed him to take forty-five of the sheets. But nothing more transpired until fifteen years later, when he again visited the monastery, this time under the direct patronage of the Czar of Russia. And then he was shown a bulky roll of parchment leaves, which included, among other manuscripts of lesser importance, the Codex now known as the Sinaitic.

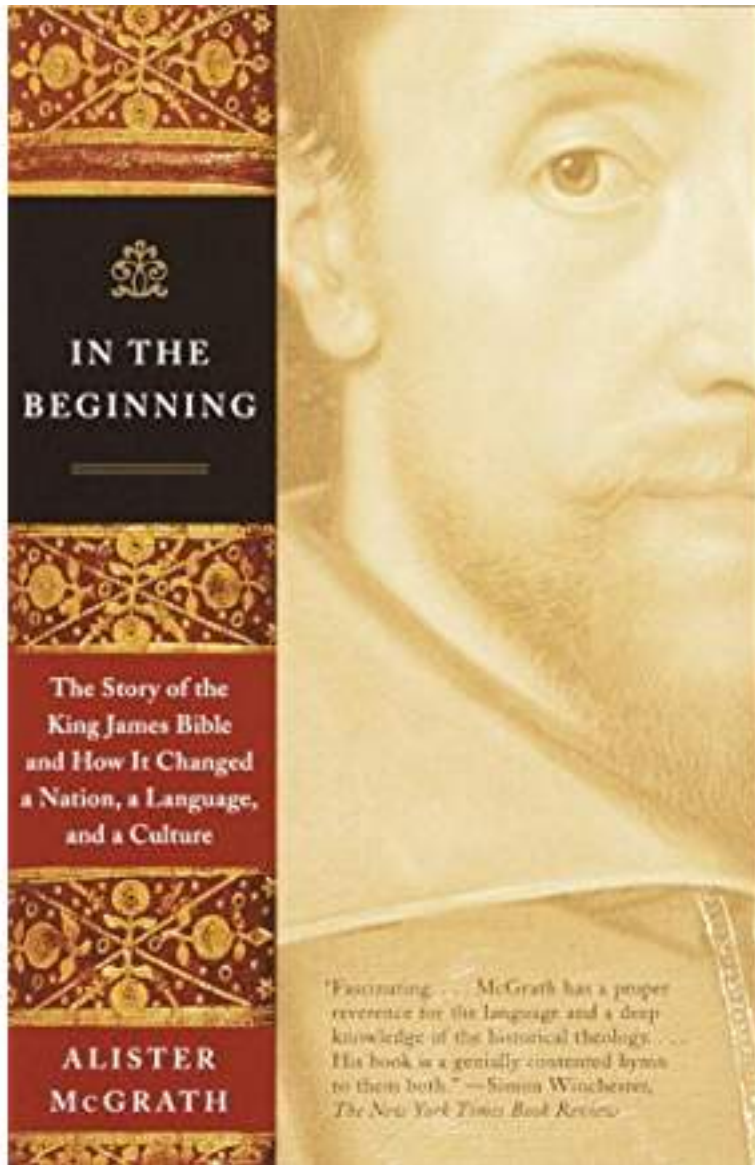
"Naturally enough Dr. Tischendorf was highly elated by his discovery. Indeed his enthusiasm was unbounded. He says, 'I knew that I held in my hands the most precious Biblical treasure in existence;' and he considered this discovery to be 'greater than that of the Koh-i-noor (diamond) of the Queen of England.'"

Which Version: Authorized or Revised? by Philip Mauro

Codex Sinaiticus



- There are more MSS of the New Testament than there are for any other writing of the period. There are minor differences between them, due to scribal errors or additions. Only in a couple of places do these differences matter. (1 Cor 13:3; Rev 1:5. Ask me.)
- What we have in our English New Testament (most versions) is a translation of an edited version of the original Greek, in which a team of scholars has arrived at what they believe is the most probable original version.
- The KJV, although a magnificent and influential piece of English, is not the most accurate version, as we now have many more MSS and know much more about textual criticism (how to evaluate the MSS for what was originally written) than did the scholars who translated the KJV in 1611.



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P.S.
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- The KJV was a translation made for reading aloud, not for private reading or study.
- The most accurate (closest to the original Greek) translation is probably the ESV, the most readable accurate translation the NIV.
- All sorts of other material about Jesus was in circulation in the early years of the church. The “canon,” which establishes what is now considered authoritative, and determined what should go into our bibles, was first put together in 321 A.D. The criterion was that the material should go back to an apostolic source.
- LXX (or “Septuagint”) refers to a translation of the Old Testament into Greek, made in the 3rd-2nd century B.C. New Testament writers generally quote from the LXX, not from the Hebrew OT. There are a lot of discrepancies between the LXX and the Hebrew text (MT).
- The Hebrew text was not fixed until about 1000 AD. In many cases the LXX is probably closer to the original. This is a difficult and complicated topic, and raises some hairy questions. We may return to it in a future class, time permitting.

KEY WORDS

Exegesis: explanation of what the text means in its original context

Hermeneutics: interpretation. This can go beyond exegesis to include application.

. . . figural interpretation

"Figural interpretation" *Echoes* p.2

Quote from Luther at beginning of *Echoes*

There are some who have little regard for the Old Testament. They think of it as a book that was given to the Jewish people only and is now out of date, containing only stories of past times But Christ says in John 5, "Search the Scriptures, for it is they that bear witness to me." . . . [T]he Scriptures of the Old Testament are not to be despised but diligently read. . . . Therefore dismiss your own opinions and feelings and think of the Scriptures as the loftiest and noblest of holy things, as the richest of mines which can never be sufficiently explored, in order that you may find that divine wisdom which God here lays before you in such simple guise as to quench all pride. Here you will find the swaddling cloths and the manger in which Christ lies. Simple and lowly are these swaddling cloths, but dear is the treasure, Christ, who lies in them.

Luther is reading the birth story *figurally*.