

The Gospel of Jesus

According to the Jesus Seminar



Robert W. Funk, Arthur J. Dewey
& the Jesus Seminar

SECOND EDITION



POLEBRIDGE PRESS
Salem, Oregon

Copyright © 2015 by Polebridge Press

All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information address Polebridge Press, Willamette University, 900 State Street, Salem, OR 97301.

Cover and interior design by Robaire Ream

Library of Congress Control Number

2014947453



Contents

Acknowledgments	vii
The Jesus Seminar	ix
Abbreviations & References	xiv
Introduction	1
The Gospel of Jesus	
Prologue—Birth, childhood & family of Jesus	15
1 John the Baptizer & Jesus	17
2 Jesus announces God’s empire	21
3 In the company of Jesus	25
4 Upsetting expectations	29
5 Powers at work	33
6 Death of John the Baptizer	37
7 Surprising vision & advice	39
8 A place at the table	43
9 Jesus & purity matters	45
10 Celebration	47
11 Sabbath observance	51
12 Kinship in the empire	53
13 In parables	55
14 Public & private piety	59
15 Signs of God’s empire	61
16 Six healings	63
17 Invaluable advice	67
18 Hospitality	69

19 Shrewd advice	71
20 In Jerusalem	73
21 The passion	75
Epilogue—Pillars & pioneers	77
Notes	79
Resources	
Table of Ancient Gospels	106
Dates of the Gospels	107
Catalogue of Ancient Gospels	109
Historical Evidence for Jesus of Nazareth beyond	
Christian Texts	117
Reports of the Jesus Seminar	119
Index of Sayings & Stories	123
Index of Ancient Texts	125



The Jesus Seminar

An Overview

In 1985 Robert Funk invited around thirty New Testament scholars to join with him in renewing the quest for the historical Jesus. A number of breakthroughs had been recently made in regard to a more nuanced understanding of parables. Moreover, recent archeological discoveries had deepened the scope of biblical scholarship. The finding of the Nag Hammadi codices in 1945 brought a collection of over fifty texts, including the Gospel of Thomas and the Dialogue of the Savior, to the table, while the discovery in 1946 of the Dead Sea Scrolls provided evidence of the remarkable diversity of voices within late Second Temple Judaism. The full effects of the discoveries of the Qumran scrolls and the codices from Nag Hammadi had yet to play out in regard to the question of the historical Jesus. Upon agreeing with Funk that this investigation was worthwhile, the group invited interested scholars to join them.

The members of the Seminar, called Fellows, were professional biblical scholars who taught in colleges, universities or seminaries. The majority of Fellows came from North America, although there were scholars from Europe, South Africa, New Zealand and Australia. Almost 200 scholars were involved throughout the course of the different phases of the Seminar. Seventy-five signed each of the two major reports. The Seminar was never sponsored, supervised, endorsed or funded by any academic or

religious organization. Anyone with the appropriate academic credentials could become a Fellow, regardless of religious commitments or point of view.

The work of the Seminar occurred in three major phases. From 1985 to 1991 Fellows met to consider all the words attributed to Jesus in the first three centuries. They began with an initial inventory of the data. No saying was considered out of bounds. Nor was a saying found in the New Testament canon privileged over a non-canonical saying (such as in the Gospel of Thomas).

The Fellows divided up into working groups to research the state of the question for each saying and to make the strongest case for authenticity. After each working group deliberated, their recommendations were returned to the entire Seminar which then met in plenary session to debate the sayings and to come to a vote on them. The Seminar sorted through about 1,500 versions of approximately 500 sayings ascribed to Jesus. A compendium of about 90 authentic sayings and parables was determined.

In order to facilitate their investigations, the Fellows constructed a definite protocol. They agreed to form an agenda and to come to a decision on the basis of the best knowledge at that time and in light of their best judgments. This collaborative work allowed Fellows to expand beyond an individual effort as well as to shorten the time for such intense research and argumentation. They agreed that their work was cumulative, which meant that they had to identify or form a consensus and then build on that consensus. They welcomed the broadest possible spectrum for these debates. In the course of their labor the Fellows dropped the typical posturing that usually accompanies academic discussion. A penchant for honesty and candor became a hallmark of the deliberations. The rarest thing happened in these debates—scholars actually admitted changing their minds!

From the outset the Jesus Seminar had a further purpose. Not only was this a renewal of the quest for the historical Jesus but it also became the basis of reporting the significance of this question to the public. All of the deliberations of the Seminar were held in the presence of Associate members and the findings of the Seminar were reported to the general public in order to promote literacy in biblical matters and to elevate the discourse about religion in public conversation.

From 1991 to the Spring of 1995 the second phase of the Seminar focused on the deeds of Jesus. Again a database was constructed out of any material from the first three centuries. And once again working groups determined the state of the question and made the strongest possible arguments for authenticity. Upon recommendations from the subcommittees the Fellows met in plenary session to debate, weigh, and vote on these matters. They delivered 387 reports of 176 events and deeds. Twenty-nine of the 176 events were deemed to contain historical information.

The third phase of the Seminar attempted to see what would be the possible ramifications of the Seminar's findings on the words and deeds of Jesus. From the database of the first two phases Fellows began to construct possible profiles of the historical Jesus. This debate and discussion lasted from 1995 to 1999.

Three publications emerged providing the results of the Jesus Seminar. *The Five Gospels* (1993) documents the first phase of the Seminar on the sayings of Jesus. *The Acts of Jesus* (1998) delivers the Seminar's report on the deeds and events in the life of Jesus. *Profiles of Jesus* (2002) offers a variety of synthetic attempts to detect what a profile of the historical Jesus could be.

The Gospel of Jesus graphically presents what the Fellows determined to be the authentic sayings and

deeds of the historical Jesus. Readers can use this volume as basis for their own investigation into the question of the historical Jesus and for their own construction of a profile of this challenging figure.

Voting

After careful study and debate, the Fellows of the Seminar voted to express their judgments on historical questions. Voting is a traditional method among biblical scholars to determine whether or not there is a consensus and if so, what its magnitude may be. Voting was done by colored beads, the meaning of which is formulated below.

Sayings

Red: Jesus undoubtedly said this or something very like it.

Pink: Jesus probably said something like this.

Gray: Jesus did not say this, but the ideas contained in it are close to his own.

Black: Jesus did not say this; it represents the perspective or content of a later or different tradition.

Deeds

Red: The historical reliability of this information is virtually certain. It is supported by a preponderance of evidence.

Pink: This information is probably reliable. It fits well with other evidence that is verifiable.

Gray: This information is possible but unreliable. It lacks supporting evidence.

Black: This information is improbable. It does not fit verifiable evidence; it is largely or entirely fictive.

The results were an average of all the votes cast. Every vote helped determine the final color; every vote counted because the average was a weighted average.

Reporting

In *The Five Gospels* and *The Acts of Jesus* the Fellows color-coded the results of their deliberations and endeavored to give a brief account of how they reached their conclusions. Creating a color-coded report was done to make its contents immediately evident to the general reader without the necessity of reading hundreds of pages of commentary. In addition, it took as its model the red-letter editions of the New Testament widely known among readers of the Bible. *The Five Gospels* made the religion bestseller list for nine months.

The translation used is the Scholars Version, as revised and found in *The Complete Gospels*, 4th ed., and *The Complete Gospels Parallels*.

Prologue



Birth, childhood & family of Jesus

Jesus was a descendant of Abraham. ²Jesus' parents were named Joseph and Mary. ³Jesus was born when Herod was king. ⁴Eight days later, when the time came to circumcise him, they gave him the name Jesus. ⁵Many in Jesus' hometown asked, "This is the carpenter, isn't it? ⁶Isn't he the son of Mary? ⁷Aren't his brothers James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And aren't his sisters our neighbors?" ⁸Phillip tells Nathanael, "We have found Jesus, son of Joseph, from Nazareth." ⁹"From Nazareth?" Nathanael said to him. "Can anything good come from that place?" ¹⁰Then he goes home, and once again a crowd gathers, so they couldn't even have a meal. ¹¹When his relatives heard about it, they came to take him away. (You see, they thought he was out of his mind.) ¹²Jesus' family took offense at him. ¹³On his visit to Jerusalem, Paul says, "I did not meet any of the Anointed's other envoys except James, our lord's brother." ¹⁴James, Cephas and John were the reputed pillars of the movement in Jerusalem. ¹⁵The risen Jesus was seen by James.

v. 1
MATT 1:1
LUKE 3:34

v. 2
MATT 1:16
LUKE 1:27

v. 3
MATT 2:1
LUKE 1:5

v. 4
LUKE 2:21
MATT 1:25

vv. 5-7
MARK 6:3

vv. 8-9
JOHN 1:45-46

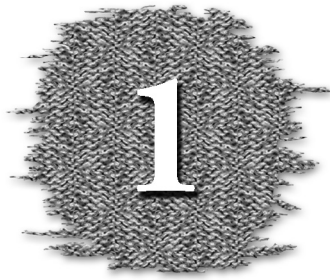
vv. 10-11
MARK 3:21

v. 12
MATT 13:57
MARK 6:3

v. 13
GAL 1:9

v. 14
GAL 2:9

v. 15
1 COR 15:7



John the Baptizer & Jesus

A voice in the desert

So, John the Baptizer appeared in the desert calling for baptism and a change of heart that lead to forgiveness of sins. ²And everyone from the Judean countryside and all the residents of Jerusalem streamed out to him and got baptized by him in the Jordan River, admitting their sins. ³And John wore a mantle made of camel hair and had a leather belt around his waist and lived on grasshoppers and wild honey.

⁴In due course John the Baptizer appears in the Judean desert, ²calling out, “Change your ways because the empire of Heaven is arriving.”

⁵So John would say to the crowds that came out to get baptized by him, “You spawn of Satan! Who warned you to flee from the impending doom? ⁶Well then, start producing fruits suitable for a change of heart, and don’t even start saying to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham for our father.’ Let me tell you, God can raise up children for Abraham right out of these rocks! ⁷Even now the axe is aimed at the root of the trees. So every tree not producing choice fruit gets cut down and tossed into the fire.”

⁸The crowds would ask him, “So what should we do?”

1:1-3
MARK 1:4-6
Matt 3:4-6
Source: Mark

1:4
MATT 3:1-2
Mark 1:15
Source: Mark

1:5-14
LUKE 3:7-15
Matt 3:7-10
Source: Q

1:15-16

MARK 1:7-8

Matt 3:11

Luke 3:16

Cf. John 1:15,

26-27

Source: Mark

⁹And he would answer them, “Whoever has two shirts should share with someone who has none; whoever has food should do the same.”

¹⁰Toll collectors also came to get baptized, and they would ask him, “Teacher, what should we do?”

¹¹He told them, “Charge nothing above the official rates.”

1:17

MARK 1:9

Matt 3:13

Luke 3:21

Source: Mark

¹²Soldiers also asked him, “And what about us?”

¹³And he said to them, “No more shakedowns! No more frame-ups either! And be satisfied with your pay.”

1:18-20

LUKE 3:18-20

Mark 1:14

Matt 4:12

Sources: Mark, Q

¹⁴The people were filled with expectation and everyone was trying to figure out whether John might be the Anointed One.

1:21-31

MATT 4:1-11

Luke 4:1-13

Source: Q

¹⁵And he began his proclamation by saying, “Someone more powerful than I will succeed me, whose sandal straps I am not fit to bend down and untie. ¹⁶I’ve been baptizing you with water, but he will baptize you with holy spirit.”

Jesus is baptized

¹⁷During that same period Jesus came from Nazareth, Galilee, and was baptized in the Jordan by John.

John is imprisoned

¹⁸And so, with many other exhortations he preached to the people. ¹⁹But Herod the tetrarch, who had been denounced by John over the matter of Herodias, his brother’s wife, ²⁰topped off all his other crimes by shutting John up in prison.

Jesus is tested

²¹Then Jesus was guided into the desert by the spirit to be put to the test by the devil. ²²And after he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was famished.

²³And the tester confronted him and said, “To prove you’re God’s son, order these stones to turn into bread.”

END OF FREE SAMPLE

Learn more and order
on the Westar/Polebridge website

