

Are the Gospels Christian?

Introduction

Most Christian churches spend the majority of their time in the Gospels. I would venture to say that 90% of the churches spend 90% of their time in these four books. While Christians should study all of the Scriptures (Romans 15.4; 1 Corinthians 10.11; 2 Timothy 3.16-17), the Gospels contain no Christianity. This may be shocking but it is true. Not one word of Christianity exists in the Gospels. The Gospels are all Jewish. They contain only Judaism—Jewish theology.

The Old Testament

What Christians call the Old Testament (Old Covenant) began with Genesis and ended with the book of Malachi. God called Abraham from Ur about 2,000 B.C. Moses received the Law about 1,500 B.C.¹ and Malachi prophesied around 400 B.C. From the time of Malachi until John the Baptist appeared, Israel had no prophet and no received prophecy. God allowed a period of prophetic silence for 400 years.

Malachi ended his prophecy with a prediction of the coming again of Elijah. He recorded God's words to the nation:

⁴ *"Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD."* ⁵ *"He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse" (Malachi 4.4-5).*

The last word of prophecy God gave the nation of Israel was that Elijah would appear to them.

Jewish Theology

Psalm 2 contains all Jewish theology. Everything else is detail. Two key concepts are present in Jewish theology: the Wrath of God and the Kingdom of God. This is outlined briefly by the following chart:

Jewish Theology (Psalm 2)	
The Wrath of God on the Earth (The Day of the Lord: The Tribulation)	The Kingdom of God on the Earth (Messianic Kingdom: Christ Rules as King)
Isaiah 2.20-21; 24.19-23, 34.1-3, Jeremiah 30.5-7; Zephaniah 1; Joel 2.1-11, 30-31; Zechariah 14.1-7	Isaiah 2.2-5; 9.6-7, 11.1-16; Jeremiah 23.3-8; 30.8-24; Ezekiel 36.21-38; 37.1-28; Zechariah 14.8-11

Woven within these events was the coming of the Messiah. The primary revelation of the Messiah that the prophets disclosed was His reign as King as David's Greater Son in the kingdom of God on earth (Zechariah 14.9). In this rule, God would fulfill His covenant promises and elevate Israel as the premier nation on earth (Deuteronomy 28.1, 13). More vague were prophecies regarding the Messiah's suffering. Especially cryptic was how He would deal with the problem of sin. Only one passage dealt with this aspect of His work: Isaiah 53. The Jews had no understanding of the significance of this passage. For them, the animal sacrifices offered by the priesthood of Israel were not shadows but reality. They had no idea of a greater truth beyond them.

Elijah

The coming of Elijah before the Day of the Lord (God's wrath) to restore the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to the fathers was God's last word to the Jews. This is where the Gospel writers pick up the story. Luke introduced Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth. Elizabeth, like Abraham's wife, Sarah, was unable to have children and was past the age of child-bearing. Zechariah was a priest, a

Levite. While performing his scheduled rotation in the Temple, an angel appeared to him at the altar of incense. Luke recorded:

¹² Zacharias was troubled when he saw the angel, and fear gripped him. ¹³ But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John. ¹⁴ You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. ¹⁵ For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb. ¹⁶ And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1.12-17).

While the angel terrified Zechariah, he gave him a joyful message of hope. He told Zechariah their prayers for a child were answered and that Elizabeth would have a son. He would not be just any son—he would be a great man of God. Indeed, he would be Elijah.

The Lord confirmed John the Baptist was Elijah—but with a catch. Jesus declared:

⁷ As these men were going away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John, "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? ⁸ But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Those who wear soft clothing are in kings' palaces! ⁹ But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and one who is more than a

prophet. ¹⁰ *This is the one about whom it is written ‘Behold, I send My messenger ahead of You, who will prepare Your way before You.’* ¹¹ *Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist! Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.* ¹² *From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force.* ¹³ *For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John.* ¹⁴ *And if you are willing to accept it, John himself is Elijah who was to come.* ¹⁵ *He who has ears to hear, let him hear (Matthew 11.7-15).*

John’s being Elijah was conditional. He was Elijah, “if you are willing to accept it.” In other words, Jesus told the nation that John could fulfill the prophecy of Malachi *if* they would accept him as Elijah. This meant accepting his message of repentance (Matthew 3.1-3). They refused.

While on the mountain where Jesus was transfigured and revealed His glory, Peter, James, and John asked Him about John. Matthew recorded:

¹⁰ *And His disciples asked Him, “Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?”* ¹¹ *And He answered and said, “Elijah is coming and will restore all things; but I say to you that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. So also the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.”* ¹³ *Then the disciples understood that He had spoken to them about John the Baptist (Matthew 17.10-13).*

Jesus’ further clarified John’s role as Elijah. John *could* have fulfilled Malachi’s prophecy of Elijah *if* the Jews had accepted him and his message. Since the nation refused to

repent, John could not fulfill the prophecy. Therefore, Elijah will have to return.²

The Gospels

What we call by convention the Old Testament ends with a prophecy of the coming of Elijah. As seen above, the Gospels pick up with this prophecy (Luke 1.12-17). What is the significance? We should be alerted to one simple fact: the Gospels are Old Testament. They are as much Old Testament as Genesis, Deuteronomy, or Isaiah. Everything in them is Jewish and pertains to the nation of Israel, the covenant promises, and the coming of the prophesied earthly kingdom of God.

If John's appearance as Elijah is not sufficient proof the Gospels are Judaism and not Christianity the Scriptures provide additional evidence of this fact.

1. The environment of the Gospels is the Mosaic Law. Jesus ministered under the Mosaic Law as did the Twelve (Matthew 22.34-40; Mark 10.2-9; 17-22; Luke 5.12-14, 17.11-14, 18.18-22). Paul, however, wrote that Christians are *not* under the Mosaic Law; we are under the administration of Grace (Romans 6.14). These are two vastly different operating environments.³
2. Jesus ministered only to Jews.⁴ Jesus also ordered his disciples not to go to Gentiles but to go to Jews alone (Matthew 10.5-6). In Christianity, Paul went to the Gentiles as the Apostle of the Gentiles (Romans 11.13; 1 Timothy 2.7; 2 Timothy 1.11).
3. The Church, the body of Christ, is that entity in which Jew and Gentile are equal in Christ. No evidence exists of equality of Jew and Gentiles in the ministry of Jesus or the Twelve. The body of Christ was a new revelation the *ascended* (as opposed to the earthly) Lord revealed to the Apostle Paul (Ephesians 2.11-22, 3.1-7). Jesus did not reveal this truth in His earthly ministry. Paul

alone wrote about the Church, the body of Christ; Paul alone wrote to Gentiles.

4. No one was known as a Christian inside the borders of Israel during the ministry of Jesus or before the salvation of Paul. Those who believed the gospel of the kingdom, that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God, were known as followers of the Way (Acts 9.2, 19.9, 23, 22.4, 24.14, 22). They were not Christians. Christianity did not begin within the borders of Israel; it began *outside* its borders. Paul was saved outside Israel on his way to Damascus (Acts 9.3-6). Believers first became known as Christians in Antioch, not Jerusalem (Acts 11.25-26).
5. Paul declared he was the founder of Christianity (1 Corinthians 3.10-11; 1 Timothy 1.15-16). He stated he received the doctrines of Christianity from the ascended, glorified Lord.⁵ Paul called these doctrines "secrets" ([μυστήριον](#)) for they were unrevealed in the Lord's earthly ministry and unknown to the Twelve. The Twelve learned of them later from Paul but continued to confine their ministry to Jews (Galatians 2.7-9). No Biblical record exists of any of the Twelve ministering to Gentiles.

Conclusion

The Gospels are Old Testament. They snap onto Malachi as easily as two lego blocks. After 400 years of silence, God moved suddenly and miraculously with the birth of John, the birth of Jesus, and the proclamation of the long-awaited kingdom of God. Indeed, even after 2,000 years, Jews understand Elijah must come before the Messiah. This is why they leave a chair vacant for him when they celebrate their Passover Seder.

Throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus spoke and taught chiefly about one thing: the kingdom of God. Every parable He

taught was about the kingdom of God. When His disciples asked Him how to pray, He told them to pray, "Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6.10). This was the earthly kingdom God had revealed to the prophets. In it, the wolf will dwell with the lamb and the leopard will lie down with the kid (Isaiah 11.6). War will end (Isaiah 11.9). The Lord Himself will rule as King (Zechariah 14.9). Nothing in Jewish theology proclaimed a heavenly kingdom and the Jews had no hope of dying and going to heaven. They certainly had no concept of a kingdom in the hearts of men. Their hope was earthly. The idea of a heavenly kingdom or a kingdom in the hearts of men are but fanciful creations of those who do not know their Bibles. They are projections forced upon the text.

Jesus also taught the other great subject of the Old Testament: the wrath of God. He warned of the deception that would come in the person of the Antichrist (Matthew 24.4-5, 11, 14) and warned the Jews of this terrible time which He called the Tribulation and what Jeremiah called "the time of Jacob's trouble" (Jeremiah 30.7). He specifically warned and commanded them to flee to the mountains when they saw the abomination of desolation revealed by Daniel (Daniel 11.31, 12.11; Matthew 24.15-21).

¹ The technical beginning of the "Old Testament" or "Old Covenant" is the advent of the Mosaic Law (Exodus 20).

² See the author's studies, [John the Baptist as Elijah](#) and [The Two Witnesses](#).

³ See the author's study, [Paul and the Law](#).

⁴ Jesus made a couple of exceptions to His rule. See the author's study, [Two Remarkable Healings](#).

⁵ See the author's studies, [Paul: Chief of Sinners?](#) and [Paul's Mystery](#).

©2014 Don Samdahl. Anyone is free to reproduce this material and distribute it, but it may not be sold.