aleph
participants
guide

"do i have a purpose?"

"is there a God?"

"what am i doing here?"

"why is there evil in the world?"

aleph

"what is the meaning of life?"

"is there more to life than this?"

"is this it?"

aleph

ask questions

learn about God

explore the Scriptures

probe for answers

hunt for truth

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welcome to aleph – a series of interactive sessions to explore jewish spirituality and messianic judaism in an informal, fun and friendly environment.

This guide outlines the content of the nine talks, each looking at a different aspect of Messianic Judaism. After each talk, there is a time for discussion in small groups—a place where you can ask questions, delve into different issues and find out what others think.

This is your guide, so use it however you like. Write, scribble, note, or doodle. Whatever helps!

talk 1
what is judaism?

what is judaism?

There is much debate as to what Judaism actually is: a religion, a race, a culture, an ethnic group, etc. The point of this talk is to emphasize that above all else, Judaism is a relationship with the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, a relationship that is offered to all. We see this through various "God-encounters" throughout the Hebrew Scriptures.

adam & eve

- Genesis 3 "walked in the cool of the garden"

enoch

- Genesis 5 "walked with God for 300 years"

noah

- Genesis 6 "walked with God and found favor with God"

abraham

- Genesis 12 & 17 "The Lord appeared to Abram…"
  - Abram wasn't Jewish
  - Abram wasn't a mensch (an exemplary person)
  - Abram wasn't too old to change, i.e., Abraham

isaac

- Genesis chapter 26: "the Lord appeared to Isaac and said... 'I am with you and I will bless you…'"

jacob

- Genesis 28**,** God **appears** to him in a dream. Jacob

wakes up and realizes he had a God-encounter. "Surely the Lord is in this place and I did not know it."

take-a-ways

- Don't get hung up with how people encounter God. It happens in many different ways. What's important is that in each example each person had an **encounter** with God that brought them into a **relationship** with God.
- It could be easy to think, "I'm not Abraham, or Isaac or Jacob. I'm not a religious person." The truth is, neither were they. He comes to us not because we are religious but because he wants a relationship.

conclusion

God wants to have an encounter with each one of us because he loves us. He wants to walk with us. He wants to be in relationship with us.

personal reflection

- How would you have defined Judaism prior to this evening?
- Where are you in your spiritual journey?
- Where would you like to be?

notes

talk 2
what is wrong with the world?

what is wrong with the world?

Last week we looked at God's **PURPOSE** - to have a personal relationship with us. The purpose of this talk is to explore the reason why many people both Jew and Gentile do not experience a personal relationship with God and do not experience the life God intended for us to have.

What is wrong with the world can be summed up in a three-letter word: sin. The Hebrew word most used for sin (chata) means to miss the mark. Chata can also mean to miss the goal, i.e., God-likeness.

what is sin?

- A sickness
- A symptom

the universality of sin:

- **Isaiah 53:6:** "all we like sheep have gone astray."
- **Ecclesiastes 7:20** Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins.
- **1 Kings 8:46:** "For there is no one that sins not."
- **Ps. 14:2-3:** "There is none that does good, no not one."

morality by comparison

- Al Capone
- Hitler
- Gandhi
- Lewis

what does sin do:

- Isaiah 44:18: “blinds us”
- Isaiah 59:2: “separates us”
- Ezekiel 18:4: “hurts us”
- Proverbs 5:22: “enslaves us”

is there a cure?

- Isaiah 61:1-2
- Isa. 53:5, 10

personal reflection

- What for you would be paradise on earth?
- Do you believe there is something wrong with the world?
- How has sin been a negative force in your life?
- How do you think the world can become a better place?

notes

talk 3
what is atonement?
is it still necessary?

what is atonement? is it still necessary?

In the first talk, we looked at God's **PURPOSE** - to have a personal relationship with us. Last week we looked at what is wrong with the world and discovered that our essential **PROBLEM** is what the Scriptures call sin. Sin separates us from experiencing a personal relationship with God. In this talk, we want to look at God's **PLAN** - the cure for our existential condition, what the Bible calls **atonement**.

jewish life: then & now

- Temple vs. synagogue
- Temple sacrifice vs. Torah service
- Priest vs. rabbi
- The focal point of the service was not a sermon but the blood of atonement.

why was atonement necessary?

- Definition of atonement: the means by which God covers the sins of his people with the blood of a sacrificed animal.
  - Leviticus 17:11 "For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life."
  - According to God's Law, atonement or forgiveness of sin always required a **sacrifice** - the death of an innocent substitute.
- Simon the Just: "The world hangs on three factors: (1) repentance (2) a Temple sacrifice and (3) a holy way of life."

birth of rabbinic judaism

- In 70 CE, the second Temple was destroyed. In response, R. Yohanan Ben Zakkai convened the council of Yavneh to restructure Judaism without priests, Temple or sacrifice.
- The council's decision was to replace the Temple sacrifice with mitzvot, i.e., good deeds.
- Problem: While good deeds are good, they were never intended to be the means of atonement.
- Why? Because they have by-passed God's primary requirement for atonement - the death of a substitute. Our good works can never be good enough!

third question: was this god's solution or man's solution?

- Granted, it was a good idea – but was it God's idea for atonement without a **sacrifice**? Answer - NO. Good deeds are good but they were never intended to be the means of atonement.
- Why - because they by-passed God's primary requirement for atonement – **a sacrificial substitute.** Our good works can never be good enough!

forth question: why the need for a substitute?

Divine Dilemma: God is love but the "the soul that sins shall die" (Ezekiel 18:20). God in his mercy and love offers forgiveness; however, His justice demands punishment. Both must be fulfilled.

fifth question: why can't god just forgive us?

- Mehmet Ali Ağca

God's Solution: Though we deserve justice, God in his love and mercy provides a sacrificial substitute to take the punishment that we deserve.

- **Passover** (Ex. 12:3): the angel of death (God's judgment upon sin) passed over those houses which had the blood of a sacrificial substitute (lamb) upon its doorposts. The lamb died in their place.
- **Rosh Hashanah** (Gen.22): Abraham's offering of Isaac: God forbids the sacrifice of his son and provides a ram as a substitute for the child. (Akedah)
- **Yom Kippur** (Lev. 16:29): sin is again atoned for through a sacrificial substitute. The scapegoat symbolically bears the sin of the people transferred through the laying on of hands by the High Priest.

conclusion

In each ritual, God demonstrates his love for us by providing a substitute to die in our place as an atonement for our sin:

- Ultra-orthodox today: they continue to recognize the biblical necessity of atonement and a sacrificial substitute. On the eve of Yom Kippur, they swing a rooster while saying this prayer…
  - Kaparot prayer: "This is my exchange, this is my substitute, this is my atonement. This rooster will go to its death, while I will enter and proceed to a good long life and to peace."
  - In Aramaic, the word for rooster is gever. But in Hebrew, a gever is a man. That is, this "**man**" will go to its death…"
  - Could it be that the animal sacrifices (roosters and lambs) were a foreshadowing of a more perfect sacrifice for our sin?
- Many believe the answer is yes – Even though we no longer have a Temple or sacrifice**,** many believe God has provided a more perfect sacrifice to die in our place – as an atonement for sin.

next week

Who Is Yeshua: What evidence is there that he is the Messiah?

notes

talk 4

yeshua: mensch, madman or messiah

yeshua: mensch, madman or messiah

In the first talk, we looked at God's **PURPOSE** for us to have a personal relationship with God. We then looked at what is wrong with the world and discovered that our essential **PROBLEM** is what the Scriptures call sin. Sin separates us from experiencing a personal relationship with God. In Last week's talk, we looked at God's **PLAN** - the cure for our existential condition, what the Bible calls atonement. This week, we want to look at God's **PROVISION** - a Person.

who do men say i am?

"When Yeshua came into the territory around Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "**Who are people saying the Son of Man is?**" They said, "Well, some say John the Immerser, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." "But you," he said to them, "who do you say I am?" **Mt. 16:13-15**

- **Josephus**
- **Albert Einstein**
- **Martin Buber**
- **Rabbi Boteach**
- **Sholem Asch**

jewishness of jesus

- Jewish Name
- Jewish Birth
- Jewish Circumcision
- Jewish Dedication
- Jewish Childhood

an observant jew

- Attended synagogue
- Celebrated the Feasts
- Wore Tzitzit

fulfilled messianic prophecy

- Messiah ben Joseph
- Messiah ben David

isaiah 53

Who believes our report? To whom is the arm
of ADONAI revealed? For before him he grew up like a young plant, like a root out of dry ground. He was not well-formed or especially handsome; we saw him, but his appearance did not attract us. People despised and avoided him, a man of pains, well acquainted with illness.

Like someone from whom people turn their faces, he was despised; we did not value him. In fact, it was our diseases he bore, our pains from which he suffered;
yet we regarded him as punished, stricken and afflicted by God.

But he was wounded because of our crimes, crushed because of our sins;
the disciplining that makes us whole fell on him, and by his bruises we are healed. We all, like sheep, went astray; we turned, each one, to his own way;
yet ADONAI laid on him the guilt of all of us.

Though mistreated, he was submissive —he did not open his mouth. Like a lamb led to be slaughtered, like a sheep silent before its shearers, he did not open his mouth. After forcible arrest and sentencing, he was taken away; and none of his generation protested his being cut off from the land of the living

for the crimes of my people, who deserved the punishment themselves.

He was given a grave among the wicked; in his death he was with a rich man.
Although he had done no violence and had said nothing deceptive, yet it pleased ADONAI to crush him with illness, to see if he would present himself as a guilt offering. If he does, he will see his offspring; and he will prolong his days;
and at his hand ADONAI's desire will be accomplished.

After this ordeal, he will see satisfaction. "By his knowing [pain and sacrifice],
my righteous servant makes many righteous; it is for their sins that he suffers.
Therefore I will assign him a share with the great, he will divide the spoil with the mighty, for having exposed himself to death and being counted among the sinners, while actually bearing the sin of many and interceding for the offenders."

his unique authority

- He claimed the authority on earth to forgive sin (Mk.2:10)
- He claimed to have equal authority to the Torah: "You have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not (kill, commit adultery, swear falsely, eye for eye tooth for tooth, love your neighbor but hate your enemy… but I say to you…" (Mt. 5)
- He exercised authority over the forces of nature (Mt. 8:23)
- He exercised authority over the demonic (Mk.12:43-45)
- He exercised authority over disease & disabilities (Mt. 8:2ff), (Jn. 9:1ff)
- He exercised authority over death (Lk. 7:11-15)

his messianic claims

- I am bread of life. (Jn.6:35)
- I am the light of the world. (Jn.8:12)
- I am the good shepherd. (Jn.10:11)
- I am the gate (John 10:9)
- I am the true vine (John 15:1)

his mega claims

- I am the Way, truth and the life. (Jn.14:6)
- I am the resurrection and the life. (Jn.11:25)
- I and the Father are one. (Jn.10:30)
- Before Abraham was, I am (Jn.8:58)

conclusion

- C.S. Lewis
- Dr. Oswald Sanders

personal reflection

- What were your thoughts or image of Yeshua in your younger years?
- What do you think of Yeshua now? Is he the kind of person you would want to know?
- If He asked you today, “Who do you say I am?” What would you say?

notes

talk 5
resurrection: hoax, joke or masterstroke?

resurrection: hoax, joke or masterstroke?

In the previous weeks, we looked at God's PURPOSE, our PROBLEM, God's PLAN AND his PROVISION. This week, we want to ask, is there any proof that Yeshua is the Messiah?

by all the rules of history, yeshua should have faded into oblivion.

- His arrest, condemnation and crucifixion should have ended the movement he began.
- He was not the expected messiah ben David – no one was looking for a messiah ben Joseph (suffering servant whose sacrifice would make atonement for Israel).
- He was abandoned by all who believed in him.
- His death was viewed as proof that he was not the messiah and therefore a false prophet

Something happened that caused his followers to believe he was in fact the Messiah. There is only one logical reason – he rose from the dead. You may ask, does Judaism even believe in the resurrection – isn't that a Christian concept? Five different Jewish sources...

jewish bible

- Job 19:25
- Daniel 12:2
- David: Ps.16:10
- Isa. 53:10

jewish tradition

- Talmud: Sanhedrin II (rabbinical commentary)
- Siddur - Amidah
- Maimonides: 13 principles of faith

jewish Scholars - Dr. Pinchas Lapide

jewish messiah: yeshua

- **He predicted** it: the Jewish Bible, Jewish writings, Jewish rabbis and Jewish scholars affirm the resurrection. But what did Yeshua believe? He not only affirmed it, he predicted it...
  - Mt. 16:21
  - Mk. 9:9-10
  - Mt. 17: 22-23
- **And he proved** it
  - Luke 24:1-7
  - John 20:19-20
  - 1 Cor. 15:3-8

finally, the jewish disciples: proclaimed it

- Acts 2:14-36
- Acts 17:19-21

conclusion

"By all the rules of history, He should have faded into oblivion. He was born the child of a peasant woman in an obscure village, tucked away in a forlorn and poor country that had been conquered and subjected to military rule. He worked in a carpenter shop until he was thirty. He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never had a family. He never went

to college. While still a young man, the tide of popular opinion turned against him. His friends ran away. One betrayed him, another denied him. He was turned over to his enemies. He went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed upon a cross between two thieves. While he was dying, his executioners gambled for the only piece of property he had on earth — his coat. When he was dead, he was taken down and laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend. He claimed to be the Jewish Messiah. And like others, who made such claims, he was executed in his prime, as a pretender and a blasphemer. His death was seen as the curse of God according to Dt. 21:22-23. Abandoned by all who believed in Him, he deserved to be forgotten. Instead, we are confronted with the startling fact that no other human being has had anything like His impact on human history. "All the armies that ever marched, all the parliaments that ever sat and all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of man upon this earth as powerfully as has that one solitary life. Why – because He is Risen!"
One Solitary Life by Dr. James Allen Francis

personal reflection

- What do you find least or most convincing about the resurrection?
- Do you think the disciples would have proclaimed the resurrection if Yeshua had not actually risen from the dead?
- Do you think the belief in resurrection is "good news?"

notes

talk 6
who is the holy spirit?

who is the holy spirit?

In the previous weeks, we looked at God's…

- God's **PURPOSE**: a personal relationship with the God of Israel
- Our **PROBLEM**: sin and separation from God
- God's **PLAN**: the blood of atonement
- God's **PROVISION**: the Messiah
- God's **PROOF**: the resurrection

This week, we want to explore God's **PROMISE** - the Ruach H'kodesh (Holy Spirit)

journey through the hebrew scriptures

- In the very first verse of the first book of the Bible we see the Spirit at work in creation
  - 'In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.'

- We also see the work of the Spirit in people's lives
  - **Job 33:4 - Elihu**
  - **Numbers 27: 18 - Joshua**
  - **Judges 6:12 - Gideon**
  - **Psalm 51:11 - David**
  - **Nehemiah 9:20 - Ezra**
  - **Exodus 31:1–5 - Bezalel**
  - **Numbers 11:25 - seventy elders of Israel**

- We see in the Hebrew Bible some of the ways the Spirit worked in the lives of those who believed in the God of Israel. At the same time, the same Hebrew Bible indicates

that in a **future time**, there will be a greater outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

- **Numbers 11:29** – "that all the Lord's people were prophets (and) that the Lord would put his **Spirit** upon them."
- **Joel 2:28** - future time when "all shall prophecy…"
- **Ezekiel 36:26** "And I will put **My Spirit** within you and cause you to follow My Laws and be careful to do what I tell you."
- **Isaiah 61:1** - promise of Messiah

messianic promise

- **John 14:16-17** "I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you forever, even the **Spirit** of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you."
- **Acts 1:4** "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you've heard me speak about. For John baptized with water; in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

shavuot (pentecost)

- **Promise fulfilled: Acts 2:1** "On the day of Pentecost all the believers were meeting together in one place. Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. And everyone present was filled with the **Holy Spirit** and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability.
- **Promise proclaimed: Acts 2:16** "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel, 'And in the last days it shall

be, God declares, that I will pour out my **Spirit** upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions and your old men shall dream dreams'"

conclusion: who is the holy spirit

The One who makes God real in our lives - who teaches you, guides you, equips you and empowers you to fulfill the purpose for which you were created!

personal reflection

- Do you believe it is possible for God (the Spirit) to live in you?
- In what ways would you like the Spirit to empower you?
- What does the Spirit need to change in your life?

notes

talk 7
what does the holy spirit do?

what does the holy spirit do?

In the previous weeks, we looked at God's PURPOSE, our PROBLEM, God's PLAN, God's PROVISION, God's PROOF and God's PROMISE to give us the Ruach (Holy Spirit). This talk is the first talk of the Aleph Retreat to explore what more the Holy Spirit does in our lives: The Spirit comes to give us new life, new identity, a new nature and new power.

what does the holy spirit do?

1. He gives us a new life.
    - John 3:3-8

2. He gives us new identity.
    - Romans 8:15
    - Ephesians 2:18

3. He gives us a new nature.
    - 2Corinthians 3:18
    - Galatians 5:22–23

4. He gives us new power.
    - I Corinthians 12:4-11
    - Acts 6:8
    - Acts 8:6
    - John 14:12

invitation

"If anyone thirst, let him come to me and drink. And out of his HEART shall flow rivers of living water" - the river of the Holy Spirit!

personal reflection

- What does being “born again” mean to you?
- What do you think it means to know God as Father?
- Is there a fruit of the Spirit you desire to grow in?
- What do you hope the Holy Spirit will do in your life today?

notes

talk 8
how can i be filled with the spirit?

how can i be filled with the spirit?

In the previous weeks, we looked at God's PURPOSE, our PROBLEM, God's PLAN, God's PROVISION, God's PROOF and PROMISE to give us new life, a new identity, a new nature and new power. In this second talk of the retreat, we will look at how we can personally be filled with the Spirit.

open-minded

- **Acts 8:4-8** Philip went to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there [not open to Jews or Judaism [not unlike many Jews today who are not open to hear about Jesus or Yeshua]. But when the crowds heard Philip and saw what happened (healings/changed lives), they all paid close attention to what he said.

open for more

- **Acts 19:1-2**
- "While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."

open to change

- **Acts 2:37-39**
- "Peter's words pierced their hearts, and they said to him, "What should we do?" Peter replied, "Each of you must **repent** of your sins and turn to God and be immersed in the name of Messiah Yeshua for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This promise is to you, to your children, and to those far away — all who have been called by the Lord our God."

importance of faith – what is faith?

- **Acts 2:41** "Those who believed what Peter said were immersed and added to the community that day—about 3,000 in all."
- **John 7:37-39** Faith is believing God to give you what he has promised.
- Faith is receiving what God has promised.
  - **Acts 8:14-17** "When the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that the Samaritans welcomed God's message, they sent Peter and John to them. After they went down there, they prayed for them that they might **receive** the Holy Spirit…"
  - **Luke 11:9** "And so I tell you, keep on asking, and you will **receive** what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, **receives**. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened…How much more will your Father in heaven give the **Holy Spirit** to those who ask."

what to expect

- Expect to receive the Holy Spirit. Different things happen to different people. Don't seek a particular kind of experience.
- Often people receive the gift of tongues. It is a gift of the Spirit to help you to pray and hear God's voice.
- Do not expect the Holy Spirit to force you to speak in tongues. It is something you yield to. Focus on God not on yourself!
- Above all, expect to receive God's love for you in a new way.

personal reflection

- Do you feel that you are open-minded; open for more; open to change?
- Do you feel that you have any barriers that would keep you from experiencing what God has for you?
- Do you feel that you can ask believing that you will receive?

notes

talk 9
how can i live a spirit-filled life?

how can i live a spirit-filled life?

In the previous week discovered how to be filled with the Spirit. In this final talk we will learn how we can live a Spirit-filled life by growing in four spiritual disciplines.

Colossians 2:7
"Therefore as you received Messiah Yeshua as Lord, so continue to walk in him – rotted and growing in him – established in your faith just as you were taught, overflowing with thankfulness."

Key word: Growing – How do we grow in the Spirit and live a Spirit-filled life?

the discipline of prayer

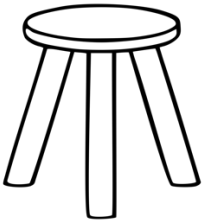
- Psalm 84
- Philippians 3:10

the discipline of scripture (bible)

- John 8:32
  - Read
  - Meditate
  - Hear
  - Study
  - Memorize

the discipline of community (fellowship)

- Acts 2:44
- Hebrews 10:24-25

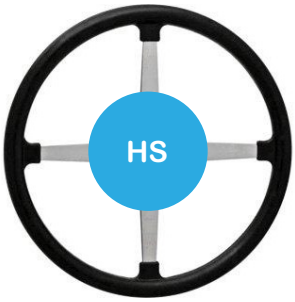


the discipline of service

- Galatians 6:10

final question – is there anything missing?

"So my dear friends, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling (paying careful attention to spiritual discipline); for God (the Spirit) who is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." (Phil.2:12-13)



personal reflection

In what ways can prayer, scripture, service and fellowship help you to live a Spirit-filled life?"

notes

appendix

what are the gospels and are they reliable?

1 what are the gospels?

The four gospels are the primary sources available about the life of Yeshua. However, upon reading them, one might find them very different than a modern biography. For example, John and Mark overlook the birth and early life of Yeshua and each one devotes a significant portion of the text to the last week of Yeshua's life. Furthermore, there is no attempt to take a neutral attitude towards the life of Yeshua. Rather, the Gospels enthusiastically proclaim that the life, death and resurrection of Yeshua gives meaning and fulfillment to our human existence.

What then do the Gospels tell us about Yeshua? Although they are very different from modern biographies (with the exception of Luke), they are also much too close to the source (30-60 years) to be considered folklore. The Gospels are a form of ancient biographical writing that seeks to explain who Yeshua was using the memoires, particularly eyewitness accounts of people who had encountered him. The main focus of ancient biographies is not the sequence of events but rather the revelation of one's identity; in this case, the identity of Yeshua as the Messiah and Son of God.

2 how does the new covenant scriptures compare to other recorded histories of antiquity?

Authors Works	Recorded	Dates of Mss.	Time Span	Copies Survived
Caesar	100-44 B.C.	A.D. 900	1,000 YRS	10
Livy	59 B.C. - A.D. 17	A.D. 300	400 YRS	27
Plato	427-347 B.C.	A.D. 900	1,200 YRS	7
Tacitus (Annals)	A.D. 56-120	A.D. 800	900 YRS	3
Pliny the Younger (History)	A.D. 61-113	A.D. 850	750 YRS	7
Thucydides (History)	460-400 B.C.	A.D. 100	600 YRS	20
Suetonious (De Vita Caesarum)	A.D. 69-140	A.D. 800	900 YRS	200+
Herodotus (HIstory)	484-425 B.C.	A.D. 100	600 YRS	75
Sophocles	496-406 B.C.	A.D. 1000	1,400 YRS	193
Catullus	54 B.C.	A.D. 1550	1,600 YRS	3
Euripides	480-406 B.C.	A.D. 1100	1,500 YRS	9

Authors Works	Recorded	Dates of Mss.	Time Span	Copies Survived
Demosthenes	383-322 B.C.	A.D. 1100	1,300 YRS	200
Aristotle	384-322 B.C.	A.D. 1100	1,400 YRS	40
Aristophanes	450-385 B.C.	A.D. 900	1,200 YRS	10
Homer	900 B.C	400 B.C.	500 YRS	643
New Testament	A.D. 35-100	A.D. 100-150	5-30 YRS	5,700

* New Testament copies include (1) fragments, (2) some incomplete copies of the NT, (3) the complete NT, which are all in Greek. Another 10,000+ manuscripts exist in Latin plus more than one million quotations from the church fathers.

3 how do we know the four gospels are the most accurate biographies of yeshua when compared with other texts about the life of yeshua?

First, the names attached to the three synoptic gospels indicate that there was no attempt to falsely attribute authorship. Matthew, Mark and Luke were rather unimportant figures in the New Covenant and yet their names are attached to three of the four gospels. Contrast this with the apocryphal gospels, which tend to use central figures in the new Covenant such as Peter, Miriam and Jacob (James). The relative obscurity of the authors of the synoptic gospels compared to the apocryphal gospels demonstrates no attempt to forge authorship. Furthermore, apocryphal gospels tend to have much later dates of authorship, centuries after the coming of Yeshua, and are full of mythological extravagances. For this reason, they were excluded from mainstream messianic communities and ultimately the canon of Scripture.

4 how do we know the gospels accurately reflect the life of yeshua?

The culture of first century Israel was exceedingly oral, far different than today's culture of the written word. Memorization was so integral to the culture that rabbis would often memorize the entire Torah. Additionally, Yeshua often spoke poetically which allowed for great ease of memorization. Finally, the literary style of the text does not necessitate exact quotations. Paraphrases that conveyed the meaning of Yeshua's words were acceptable means of transmitting his teachings.

5 how should i read the gospels?

The Gospels, as the whole Bible, are not to be studied as merely an academic exercise. One person said it this way, “Reading the Bible is a form of prayer. It is not just a book but God’s love letter to you. It is a revelation of God’s mind and heart. Reading it is aligning your mind and your heart with God’s. Therefore, it is a fulfillment of prayer.”

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