

UNIT INTRODUCTION 9

Aim: The aim of this unit is to examine scholarly debates on the 'gospel' genre and on the communities that supposedly lie behind the canonical gospels.

* The usual practice is to retain the capital 'G' for the four canonical gospels (i.e. Mark, Matthew, Luke and John) only when they are used as titles (the Gospel of Matthew).

Overview: You are advised to start work on this unit by reading my handout entitled 'What is a Gospel?', which maps out some of the questions raised about the 'gospel' genre (= literary form) and the impact or effect of that genre as a mode of communication in an early Christian context. The handout also notes some recent attempts to establish links between the canonical gospels - that is, in terms of their genre - with ancient Greek and Roman biographies (*bios* - 'life'; *bioi* - 'lives'). For this first part it is then recommended that you read the book chapters or articles listed below under 'Essential Reading' (the chapter on 'gospel' in the *Oxford Companion to Biblical Studies*, as well as the studies by Bailey and Burridge); these will help you familiarise yourself with key issues relating to gospel genre.

The second part of the unit focuses on the question as to whether the canonical gospels were written for particular communities (e.g., the Matthean community, the Johannine community) or, from the outset, were intended for a much broader readership. This issue was first highlighted by Richard Bauckham (see below) in his edited volume *The Gospel for All Christians*, but the hypothesis has been subjected to critical scrutiny in numerous articles (see articles by Esler and Sim). The publications listed under 'Recommended Reading' focus on particular aspects of the topic(s) for this unit.

Essential Reading

1. What is a Gospel? I would recommend that you first read the brief article on gospel (genre) in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, to enable you to familiarise yourself with the scholarly discussion on this topic. This should be followed by Richard Burridge's article entitled 'Gospels' for the *Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies*. The chapter offers a useful summary of his earlier work on the links between the canonical gospels and the Graeco-Roman biographies (*bioi*), but he also notes trends in past and present scholarship as well as possible future directions. This article can be read in conjunction with J.L. Bailey's chapter on 'Genre Analysis', which considers the question from a broader and more methodological perspective.

2. Gospel Communities The key contribution on this topic is undoubtedly Richard Bauckham's introductory chapter in his edited volume *The Gospels for All Christians*. This chapter and the (critical) discussion that it generated (including the articles by Philip Esler and David Sim) represent a major landmark in gospel studies over the past fifteen years. It is essential to work one's way through Bauckham's thesis and the responses to it.

Burridge, R.A., 'Gospels', in J.W. Rogerson and J.M. Lieu (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies* (Oxford: OUP, 2008), 432-44.

Bailey, J.L., 'Genre Analysis', in Joel B. Green (ed.), *Hearing the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1995), 197-221.

Bauckham, R., 'For Whom Were Gospels Written?', in R. Bauckham (ed.), *Gospels for All Christians* (London/Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 9-48.

Esler, P.E., 'Gospel and Community in Early Christianity: A Response to Richard Bauckham's *Gospels for All Christians*', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 51 (1998), 235-53.

Sim, David C, 'The Gospels for All Christians? A Response to Richard Bauckham', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 84 (2001), 3-27.

Recommended Reading

If you wish to read additional material on the genre 'gospel', a clear – but more general – assessment of the key issues can be found in the chapters of Graham Stanton and John Muddiman.

The issue of whether the gospels were written for particular communities, or for all (Christian) communities, continues to be discussed at length. Edward Klink, one of Richard Bauckham's doctoral students, has recently edited a particularly useful volume; his own introduction and chapter provides a summary of the issue with reference to John's Gospel, and you are recommended to read Adele Reinhartz's highly illuminating and valuable critique of 'the Bauckham hypothesis'.

Stanton, G.N., 'What is a Gospel?', *Gospels and Jesus* (Oxford: OUP, 2002, 2nd edition), 13-36.

Muddiman, J., 'The Gospels', in J. Barton (ed.), *The Biblical World*, Volume 1 (London: Routledge, 2004), 162-87.

Klink III, E., 'Gospel Audience and Origin: The Current Debate', in Edward Klink III (ed.), *The Audience of the Gospels: The Origin and Function of the Gospels in Early Christianity* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 1-26.

Klink III, E., 'Conclusion: The Origin and Function of the Gospels in Early Christianity', in Edward Klink III (ed.), *The Audience of the Gospels: The Origin and Function of the Gospels in Early Christianity* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 153-66.

Reinhartz, A., 'Gospel Audiences: Variations on a Theme', in Edward Klink III (ed.), *The Audience of the Gospels: The Origin and Function of the Gospels in Early Christianity* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 134-52.