

# four stories of Jesus

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**Matthew**

**Mark**

**Luke**

**John**

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## John

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- believers were being **excommunicated** from the synagogues

“they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be **put out of the synagogue**” John 9:22

“many, even of the authorities, believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they did not confess it, for fear that they would be **put out of the synagogue**” John 12:42

“They will **put you out of the synagogues**”

John 16:2

# four stories of Jesus

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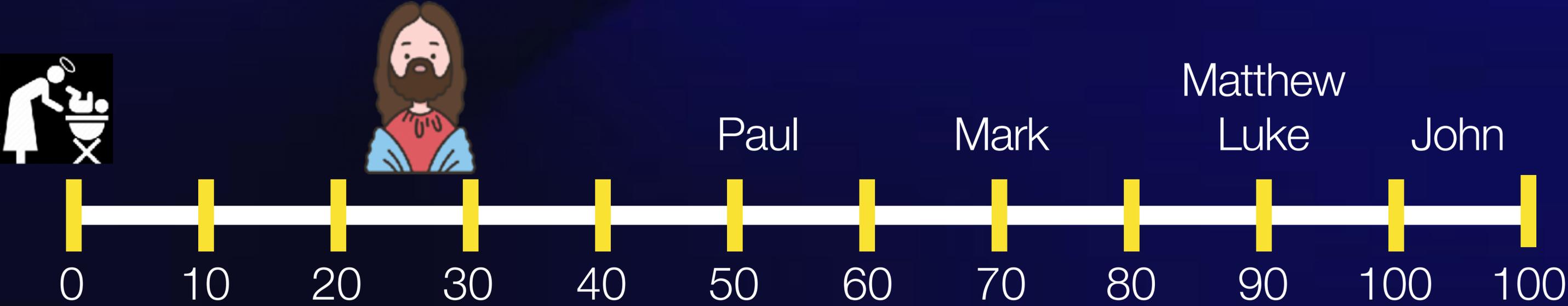
# four stories of Jesus

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- believers were being excommunicated from the synagogues
- the author is anonymous
- literary/theological similarities with the three epistles of John
- doubtful that John of Patmos, who wrote Revelation, could be the author

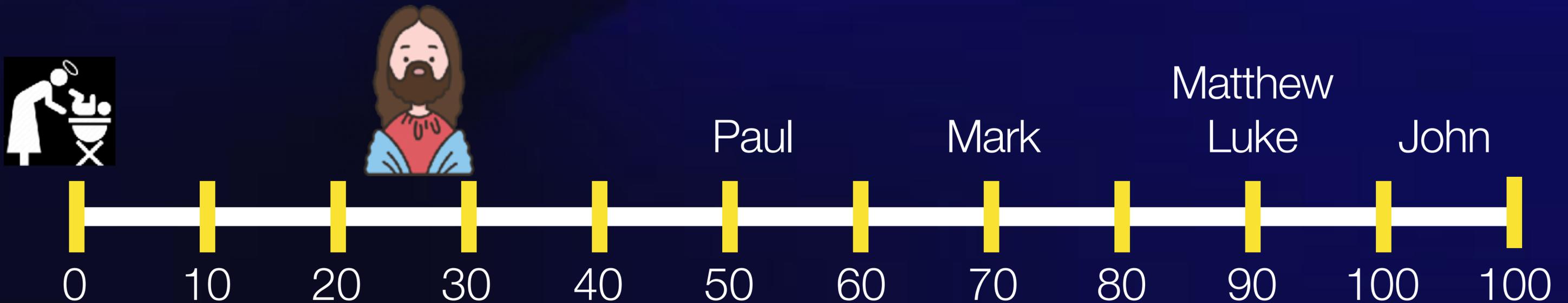
# John's historical context — beyond apocalypticism

Roman dominion over Jerusalem began in 63 BC, after the full century of independence that followed the Maccabean revolution



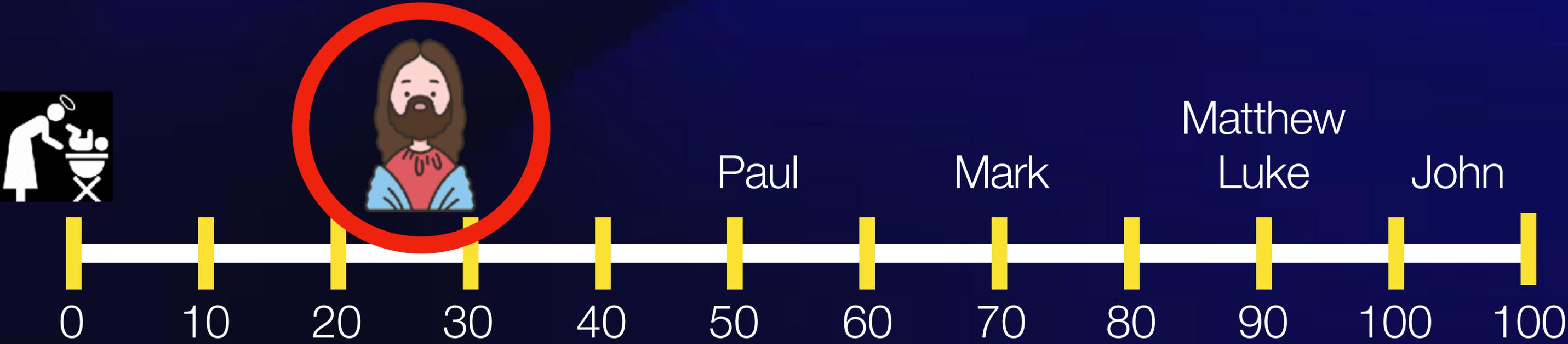
# John's historical context — beyond apocalypticism

How long would the all-powerful God of Israel permit an unholy empire to rule God's holy people and God's holy land? → apocalyptic expectations



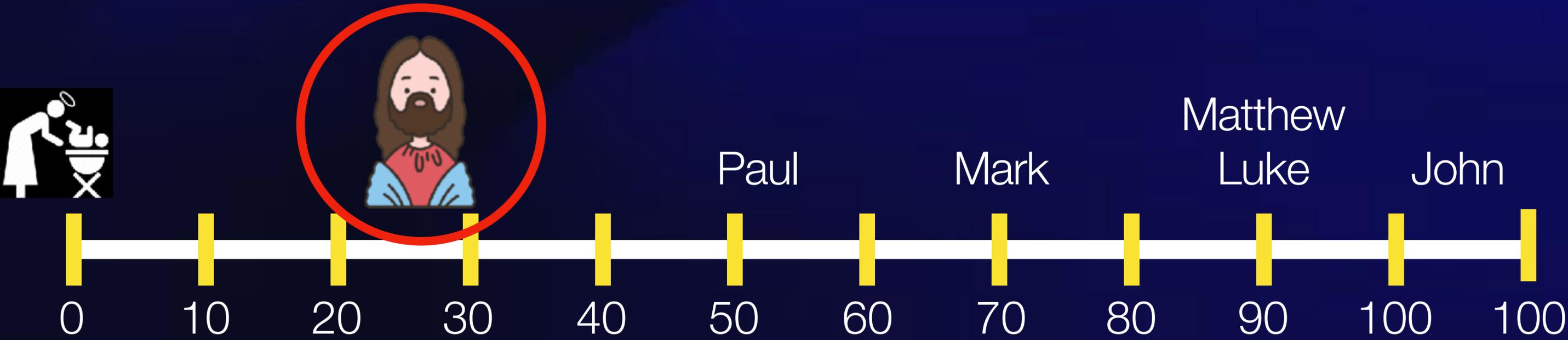
# John's historical context — beyond apocalypticism

Many would-be Messiahs appeared. Jesus may have seen himself as a messianic figure... but if this were Jesus' intention, he was a failed messiah.



# John's historical context — beyond apocalypticism

Nevertheless, the hope persisted that Jesus was the messiah.



# John's historical context — beyond apocalypticism

## Paul

believed the “day of the Lord”  
would come in his lifetime

1Cor 1:7 — so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.



Mark

Matthew

Luke

John



# John's historical context — beyond apocalypticism

## Paul

believed the “day of the Lord”  
would come in his lifetime

1Cor 7:29-31 — the appointed time has grown short....  
the present form of this world is passing away



Mark

Matthew

Luke

John



# John's historical context — beyond apocalypticism

## Paul

believed the “day of the Lord”  
would come in his lifetime

1Cor 16:22 — μαράνα θά ... Our Lord, come!



Mark

Matthew

Luke

John



# John's historical context — beyond apocalypticism

In 66 AD, there was a **successful uprising**. Led by the Zealots, the Romans were thrown out of Jerusalem. Jerusalem was free from Roman control from 66-70 AD.



Paul

Mark

Matthew

Luke

John



# John's historical context — beyond apocalypticism

In 70 AD, Rome amassed a force, retook Jerusalem, and **destroyed the Temple**.



Paul

Mark

Matthew  
Luke

John



# John's historical context — beyond apocalypticism

Would Israel's God tolerate **the destruction of the Temple?**

It was believed by some, in Mark's time, that **this would surely force God's hand.**



# John's historical context — beyond apocalypticism

## Mark

“this generation will not pass away” before the end comes

Mark 13:14 — But when you see the desolating sacrilege set up where it ought not to be (let the reader understand), then those in Judea must flee to the mountains.



Paul

Mark

Matthew  
Luke

John



# John's historical context — beyond apocalypticism

## Mark

“this generation will not pass away” before the end comes

Mark 13:30 — Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place.



Paul

Mark

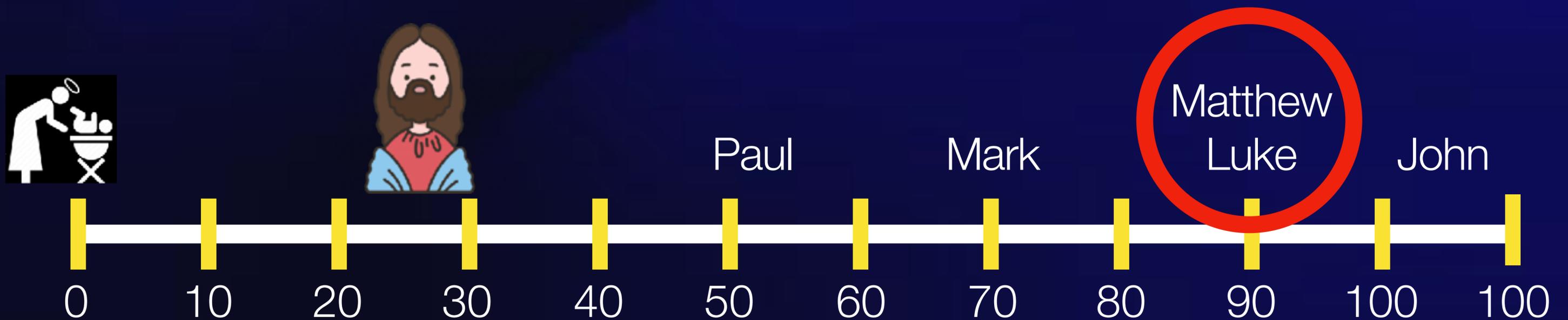
Matthew  
Luke

John



# John's historical context — beyond apocalypticism

By Matthew's and Luke's time c. 90 AD, twenty years had lapsed since the destruction of the Temple. God clearly had clearly not acted.



# John's historical context — beyond apocalypticism

## Luke

“the kingdom of God  
is within you”

Luke 17:20-21 — “The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There it is!’ For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you.” ἐντὸς ὑμῶν



Paul

Mark

Matthew  
Luke

John



# John's historical context — beyond apocalypticism

## Mark

14 references to  
“kingdom of God”

## Matthew

37 references to  
“kingdom of God”  
or “kingdom of heaven”

## Luke

32 references to  
“kingdom of God”

# John's historical context — beyond apocalypticism

## John

just 2 references to “kingdom of God”  
and John is **not** referring to a future event...

Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the **kingdom of God** without being born **from above**.” (John 3:3)

Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the **kingdom of God** without being **born of water and Spirit**.” (John 3:5)

## John's intentional pun — *born again*

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.”

Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being **born from above**.” *γεννηθῆ ἄνωθεν*

Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?”

Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’

(John 3:1-7)

KJV - born again

RSV - born anew

NIV - born again

NRSV - born from above

Not only has John abandoned Jewish eschatology,  
he has moved beyond Jewish theology altogether and embraced Hellenism

# the philosophical world of Hellenism

## Stoicism

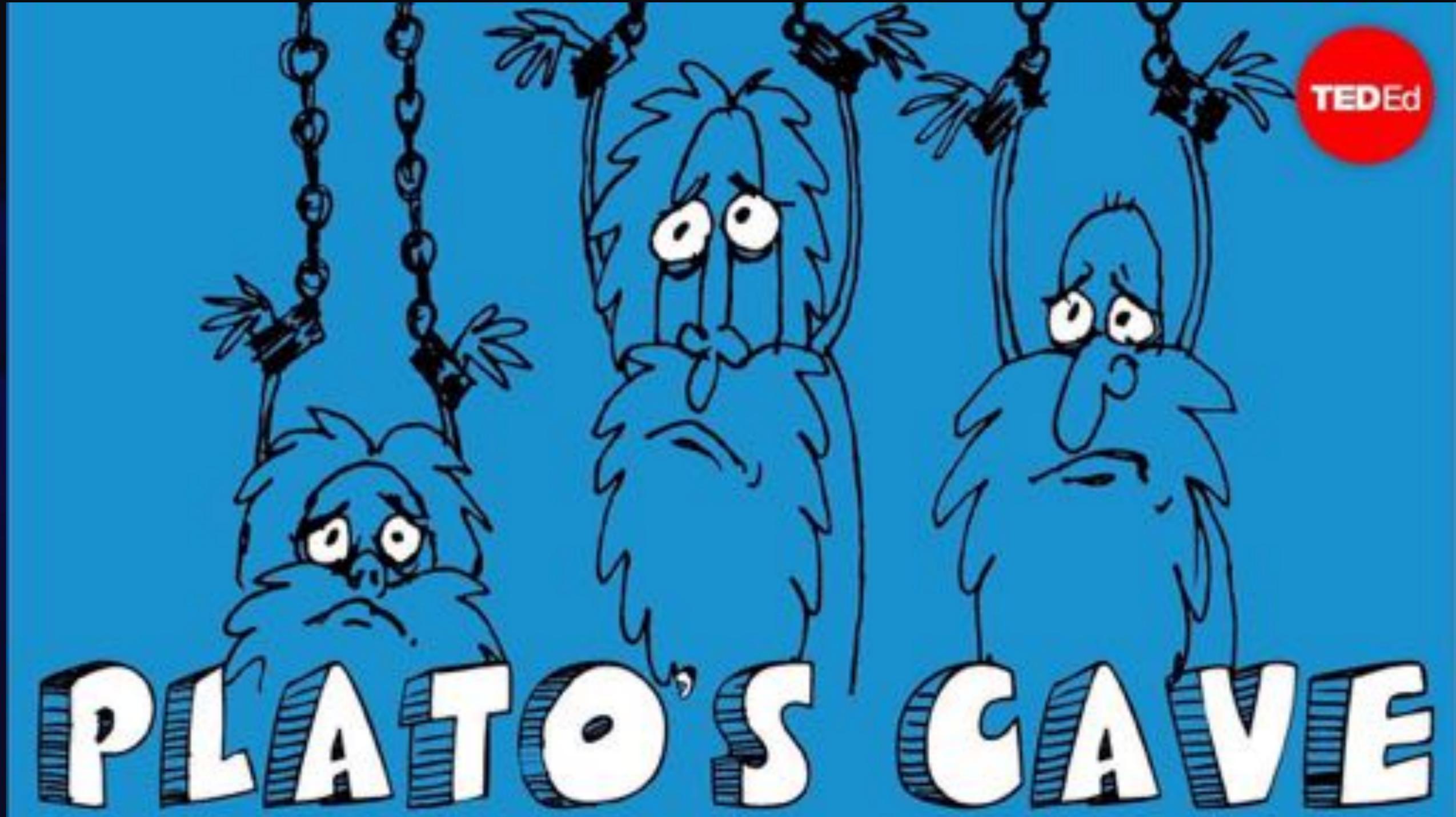
the *cosmos* is permeated by a divine/rational force (**Logos**) that orders it by Law (*nomos*)



## Platonism

- the material universe is an imperfect image of the divine world
- only the divine is “real” — eternal, changeless, perceived through intellect.
- God is perfect, good, immutable, ineffable, impassive.

Platonism — the allegory of the cave



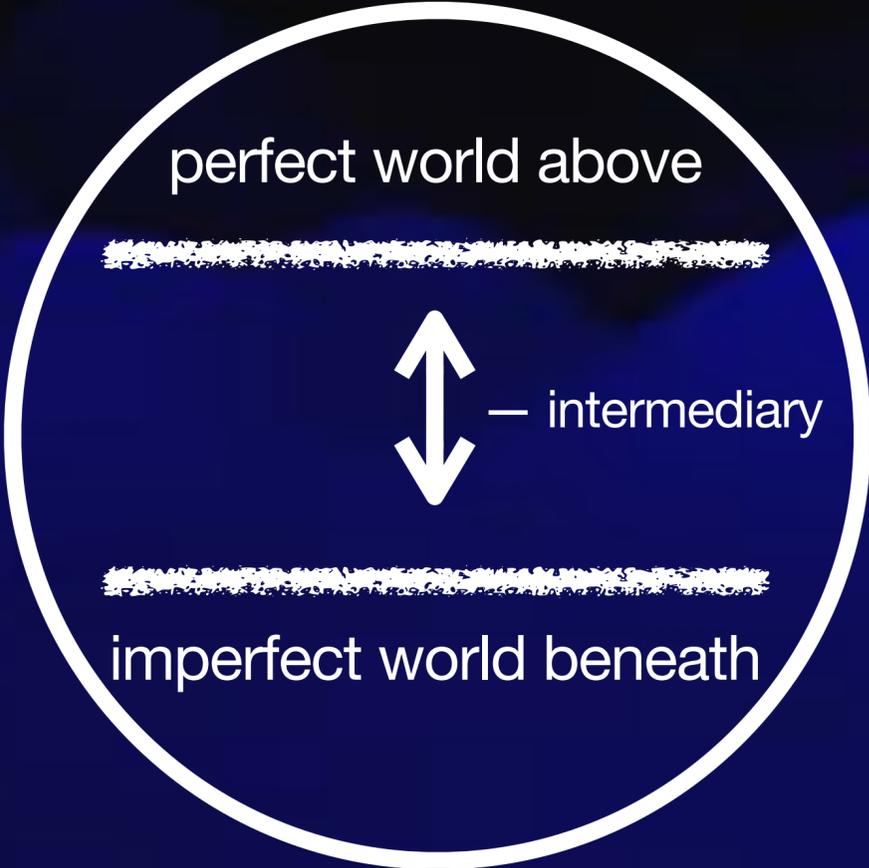
# the philosophical world of Hellenism

## Stoicism + Platonism



Hellenism

a perfect God relates to an imperfect world at a distance, through an intermediary



# the philosophical world of Hellenism

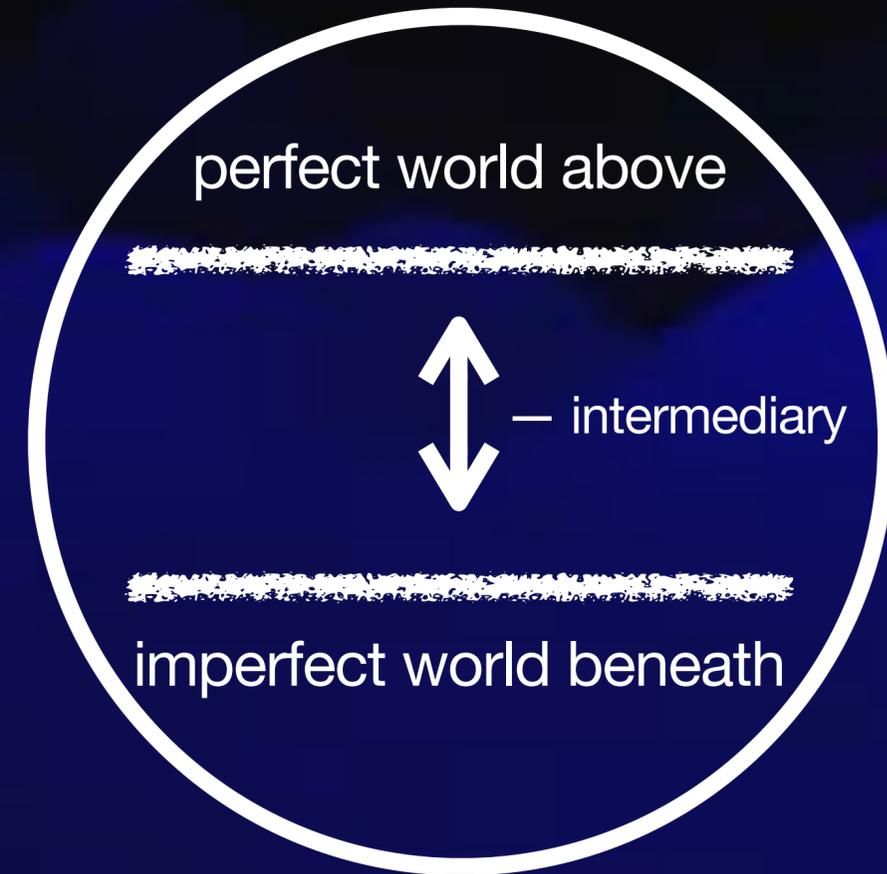
## Stoicism + Platonism



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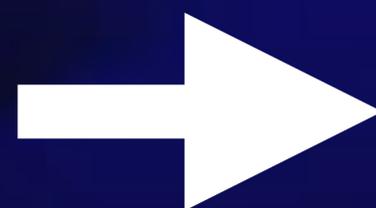
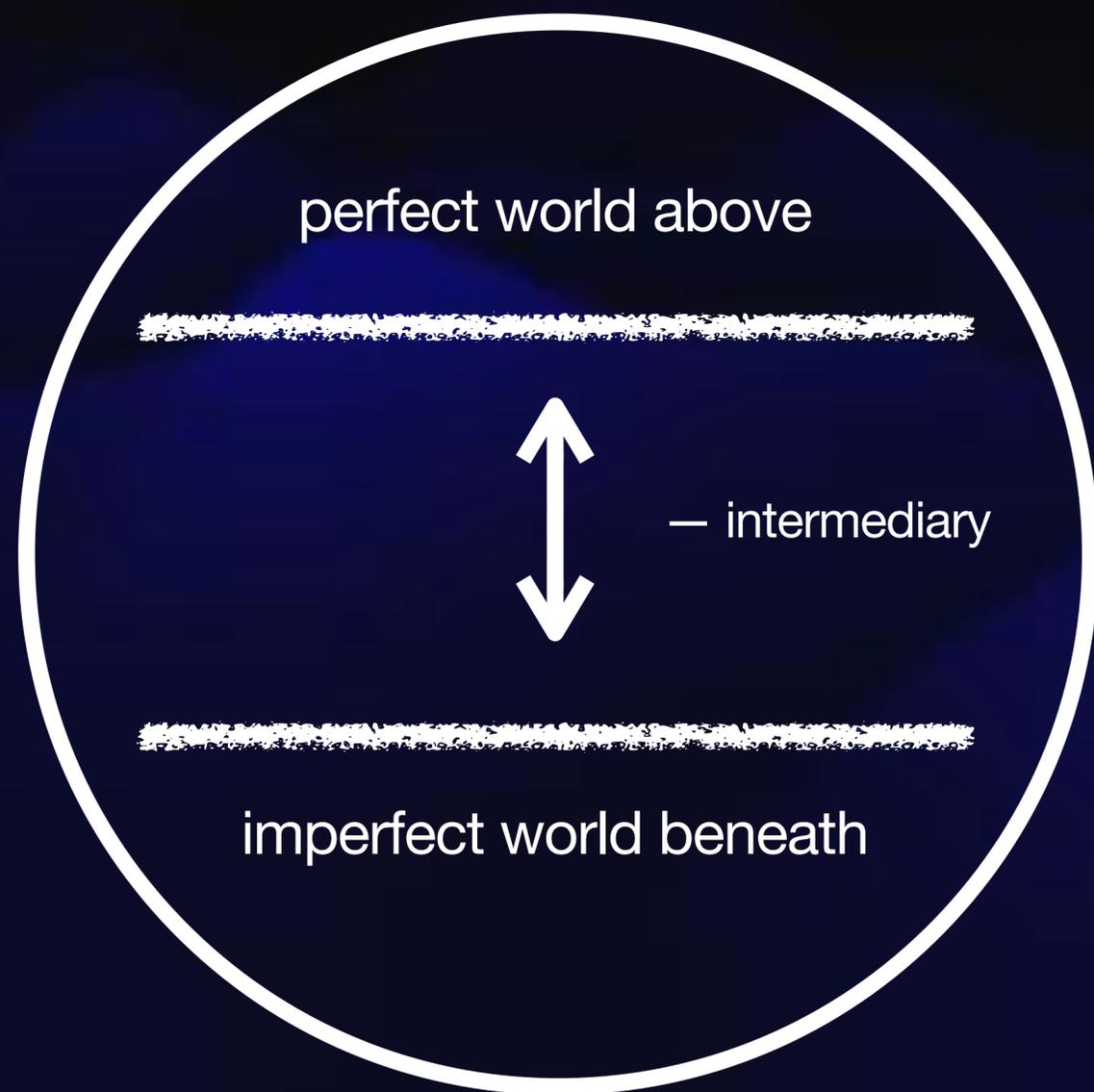
those outside the cave:  
freedom and light, see **reality**



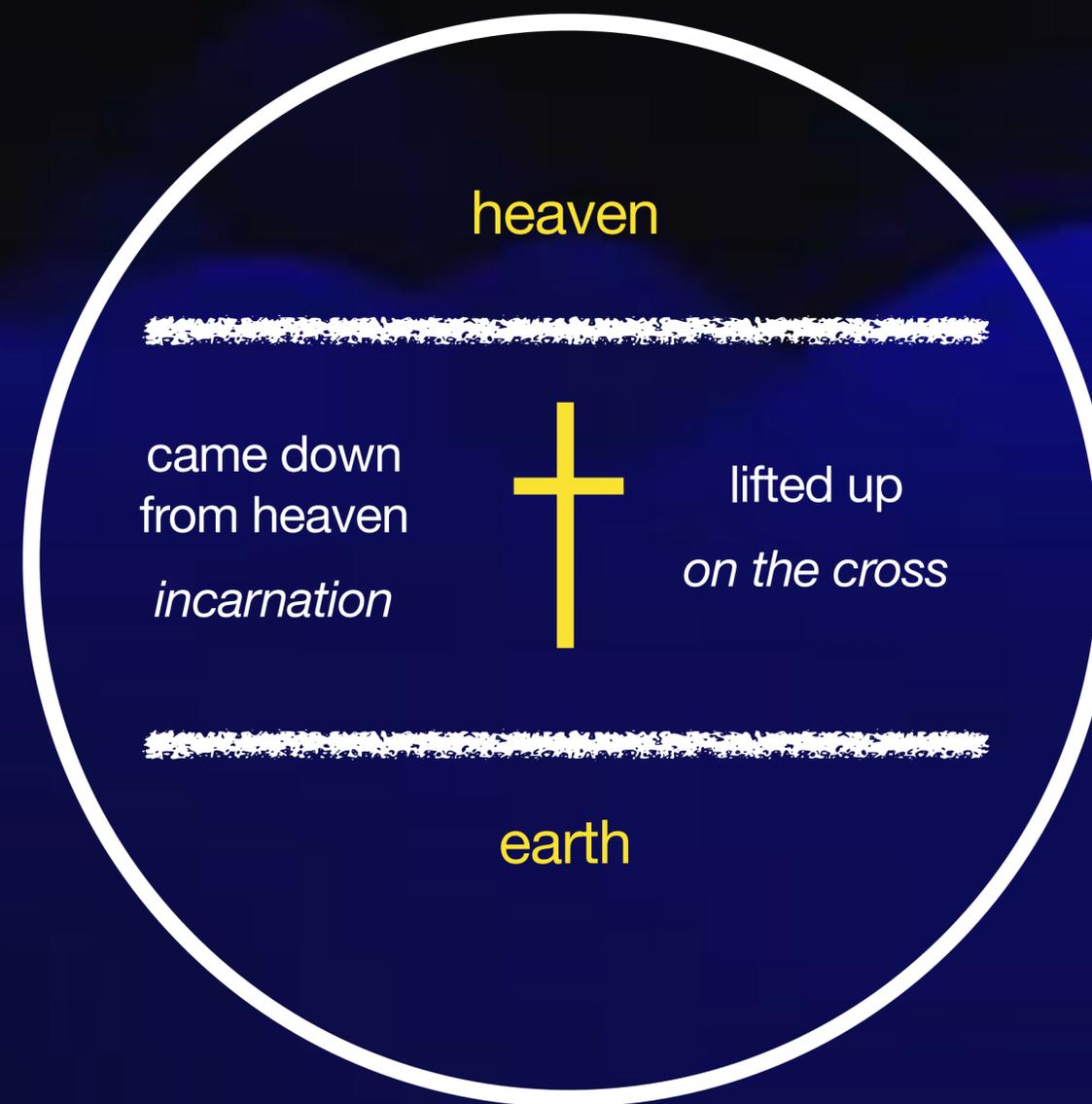
those inside the cave:  
darkness and bondage, see **illusions**

the Gospel of John adopts the worldview of Hellenism

Hellenism



Gospel of John



## John equates God with the *Logos* of the Stoics

In the beginning was **the Word** (λόγος)  
and the Word was with God,  
and **the Word was God**.  
He was in the beginning with God.  
All things came into being through him,  
and without him not one thing came into being.  
What has come into being in him was life,  
and the life was the light of all people.

And **the Word became flesh** and lived among us,  
and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son,  
full of grace and truth.

(John 1:1-4, 14)



and adopts the **dualistic language** of Platonism

### light/darkness

What has come into being in him was life,  
and the life was the light of all people.

The **light** shines in the **darkness**,  
and the darkness did not overcome it.

John 1:3b-5

### came down/lifted up

I am the living bread that **came down from heaven**.

John 6:51

And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness,  
so must the Son of Man be **lifted up**.

John 3:14



and notice the verbs that John uses

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος,  
καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν,  
καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος. John 1:1

John's Greek reflects a **Hellenistic worldview**  
a Logos that simply "exists"

(the verbs that begin the Gospel of John are forms  
of the Greek verb "to be")

## contrast John to the language of Genesis

### Gen. 1:1 (“Priestly Source”)

*Jewish concept of the divine per “P”*

In the beginning when **God created** the heavens and the earth.”

### Genesis 2:7 (“Jahwist Source”)

*Jewish concept of the divine per “J”*

Then the LORD God **formed man** from the dust of the ground, and **breathed into his nostrils** the breath of life; and the man became a living being.

**The God of the Hebrew Bible is a “hands on” Creator who forms Adam out of clay, physically breathing life into his nostrils.**

# John's characterization of Jesus

## John's characterization of Jesus

The Jesus of the **synoptic gospels** is fully human.  
We can imagine him walking the dusty roads of Galilee,  
dirty feet,  
soiled robes,  
feeling the cold and the heat,  
at times shivering, at times covered in sweat.

We see him hungry, literally famished.  
We witness his compassion for the crowds,  
even as they constantly pursue him.

We see him welcoming children,  
holding them in his arms,  
touching the sick and accepting the touches of others.

## John's characterization of Jesus

the Jesus of the synoptics **experiences hunger**...

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. Luke 4:1-2

... but in John, **the temptation story never happens**, and Jesus is never described as being hungry. There is but one reference in John to the word "hunger," and that verse denies the reality of physical hunger for those who believe.

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life.  
Whoever comes to me will never be hungry,  
and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." John 6:35

## John's characterization of Jesus

the synoptic Jesus **feels compassion** and **praises the compassion of others**...

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion (ἐ**σπλαγχνίσθη**) for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. (Mt. 9:36)

But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity (ἐ**σπλαγχνίσθη**). Lk. 10:33

the verb **σπλαγχνίζομαι** — to experience great affection and compassion for someone — is used in all three synoptics... but **never in John**

**σπλήνα**

## John's characterization of Jesus

the Jesus of the synoptics **embraces touch**... and allows others to touch him

People were bringing even infants to him **that he might touch them**; and when the disciples saw it, they sternly ordered them not to do it. But Jesus called for them and said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs." Luke 18:15

Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and **touched him**, and said to him, "I do choose. Be made clean!" Mark 1:41

## John's characterization of Jesus

compare this resurrection story in Luke...

While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. **Touch me and see**; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet."

Luke 24:36-40)

to this resurrection story in John...

When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, **Do not hold on to me**, because I have not yet ascended to the Father.

Luke 20:14-17

the Johannine Jesus avoids touch ... because he abides in the realm above.

what about Peter?

## the call of Peter

The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi" (which translated means Teacher), "where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed). He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter).

John 1:35-42

will the disciples correctly recognize who Jesus is?

**John the Baptist**

**two of John's disciples**

**Andrew**

The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the **Lamb of God!**" The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "**Rabbi**" (which translated means Teacher), "where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the **Messiah**" (which is translated Anointed). He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter).

John 1:35-42

will the disciples correctly recognize who Jesus is?

**Philip**

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found **him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote**, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.”

**Nathaniel**

Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!” Nathanael asked him, “Where did you get to know me?” Jesus answered, “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.” Nathanael replied, “Rabbi, you are the **Son of God!** You are the **King of Israel!**” Jesus answered, “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.” And he said to him, “Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the **Son of Man.**”

**Jesus**

John 1:43-51

what about the story in which Jesus is finally confessed  
as “the Messiah, the Son of the living God”?

Mark 8:28-30

He asked them, “But who do you say that I am?”  
Peter answered him, “**You are the Messiah.**” And he [rebuked] them not to tell anyone about him.

Matthew 16:15-17

He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”  
Simon Peter answered, “**You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.**” And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my Father in heaven.

Luke 9:19-21

He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”  
Peter answered, “**The Messiah of God.**” He sternly ordered and commanded them not to tell anyone.

Jn. 11:17-27

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother.

When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.” Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

She said to him, “Yes, Lord, **I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God**, the one coming into the world.”

John's perplexing ending(s)

## the first ending of John

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

John 20:24-30

## the first ending of John

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

John 20:30-31

Does John 20:30-31 sound like an ending?

Does it feel like the story has reached its conclusion?

## the second ending of John

After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing...

John 21:1-3

listing a group of disciples... what do you notice about this list?

## the second ending of John

Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, “Children, you have no fish, have you?” They answered him, “No.” He said to them, “Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea. But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off.

John 21:4-8

Does this remind you of a story from another gospel?

## the second ending of John

When they had finished breakfast, **Jesus said to Simon Peter**, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my lambs.”

**A second time he said to him**, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Tend my sheep.”

**He said to him the third time**, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” And he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.

John 21:15-17

## why does John have two endings?

**first ending** — Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

John 20:30-31

**second ending** — This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and has written them, and we know that his testimony is true. But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

John 21:24-25

# John's three Passovers

## John's three Passovers

John 2:13 — *The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem...*

Jesus cleanses the temple

John 6:4 — *Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near...*

Jesus feeds the 5,000

John 11:55 — *Now the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover to purify themselves...*

the triumphal entry (Palm Sunday)

## John's three Passovers

A “literal” interpretation would say that John is referring to three passovers over three years and, therefore, that Jesus’ ministry was conducted over three years.

“In John's Gospel, Jesus attended at least three annual Passover feasts (John 2:13; 6:4; 11:55-57).

At the shortest, His ministry would have been 2½ years.”

*compellingtruth.org*

# John's three Passovers

We might try read the synoptics as a linear account of Jesus' story,  
but that makes no sense in John's narrative world.

John 2:13 — *The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem...*

Jesus cleanses the temple

John 6:4 — *Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near...*

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the triumphal entry (Palm Sunday)

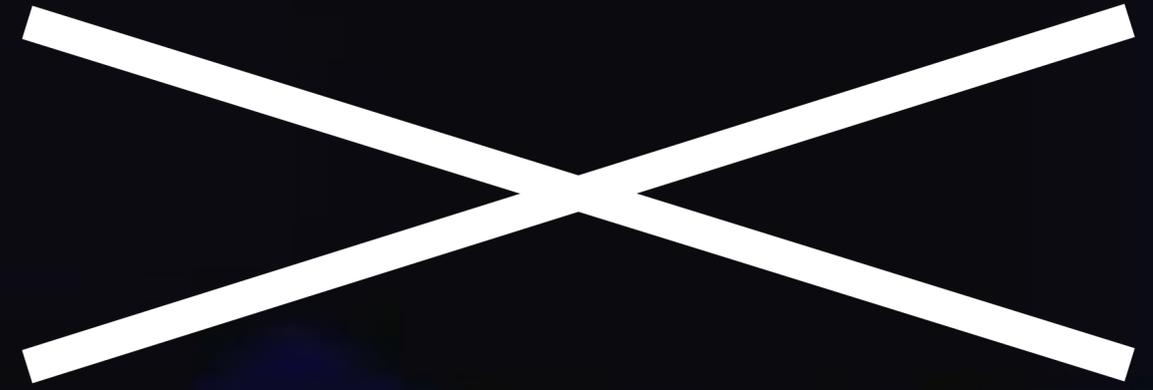


**What's the problem with  
assuming these events  
take place over three years?**

the shape of John's story



Mark

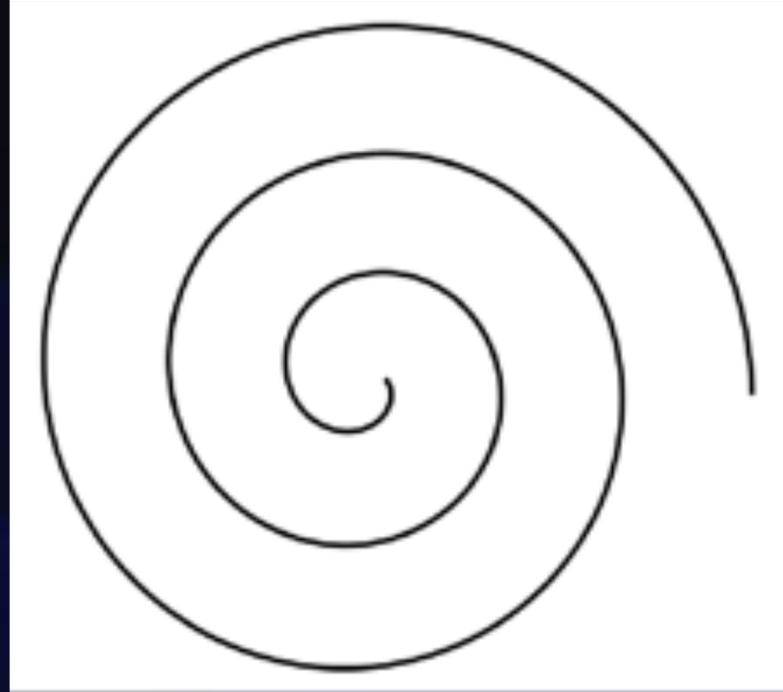


Luke-Acts



Matthew

the shape of John's story



a spiral...  
going in circles,  
coming back to the same location,  
but returning on a different plane

## observations about John's use of story and discourse

1. Can be hard to tell where “story” ends and “discourse” begins, or where one discourse ends and the next begins.

2. Multiple thematic threads woven into a single discourse.

Example: John 14:15–16:15

- keep my commandments
- sending the Advocate, Spirit of truth, Holy Spirit
- abide in me, I abide in you
- vine, branches, vinedresser
- bear fruit
- abide in my love, love one another

3. Discourses are fluid, circular, organic in structure, returning to where they began.

assignment for next week

read the Gospel of Thomas

[tinyurl.com/gospelofthom](http://tinyurl.com/gospelofthom)

The Infancy Gospel of Thomas

<http://www.gnosis.org/library/inftoma.htm>