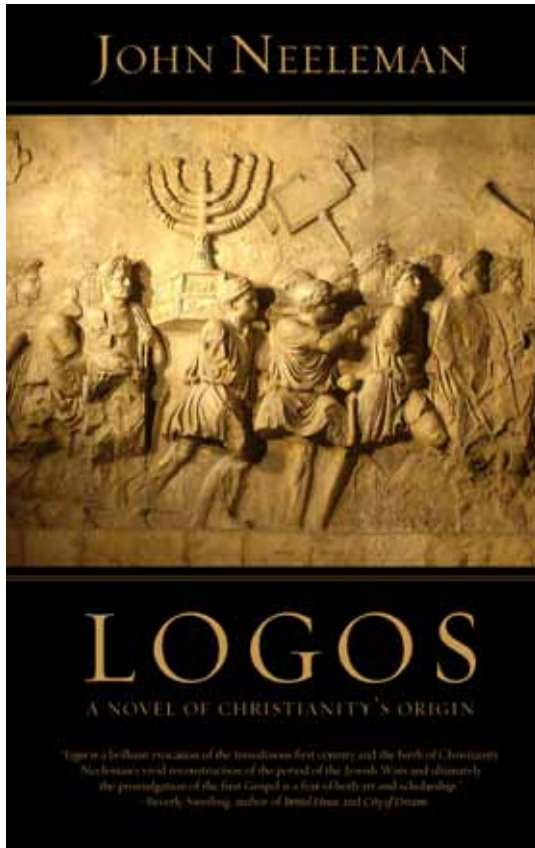


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Discussion Questions

1. LOGOS is told from various narrative viewpoints. How many narrative viewpoints can you identify in the novel? How do these viewpoints differ when depicting similar subject matter?
2. How did you feel about Paul of Tarsus as a central character in the novel? How does the author, John Neeleman, portray him? Were you surprised by his portrayal? Did you feel he was a less sympathetic character than James the Just?
3. Why are Paul and Tiberius so attached to one another? Is their relationship more jailer and prisoner, executioner and martyr, co-conspirators, or old friends?
4. Why does Tiberius say that Paul's death is "necessary for the movement"? Does Paul die for his beliefs? What does the novel have to say about the significance of martyrdom to the attraction and growth of Christianity?
5. What did you know about first-century Palestine and Rome before reading this novel? Has it changed your perceptive of it? How tolerant was Rome of cultural and religious diversity within its empire as dramatized in the novel? Does that differ from what is suggested in the New Testament or depicted in "Christian" popular fictional narratives such as *The Robe* or *Ben-Hur*?
6. There are various important female characters in this story. How does the relevant culture, social norms within that culture, and the social status and religion of each of these women affect their interactions with their society and with men, including Jacob? Do you feel this is consistent with your understanding of the times? How do the novel's female characters shape Jacob's character?
7. How does the novel depict the Roman and the Jewish peoples as the conflict between them develops and turns into a blood-bath? Does it take sides, i.e., express greater sympathy for either side of the conflict?
8. The author, John Neeleman, has expressed that LOGOS is a historical novel about the advent of Christianity and the anonymous author of the original Gospel from a Jewish perspective. Do you agree? How does historical fiction influence the way we look at history?

LOGOS is a bildungsroman about the anonymous author of the original Gospel, set amid the kaleidoscopic mingling of ancient cultures. In A.D. 66, Jacob is one of Jerusalem's privileged Greco-Roman Jews. When Roman soldiers murder his parents and his beloved sister disappears in a pogrom led by the Roman procurator, he joins Israel's rebellion against Rome. The rebellion he helps to foment leads to more tragedy—personal and, ultimately, cosmic: Jacob's wife and son perish in Rome's siege of Jerusalem, and the Romans destroy Jerusalem and the Temple, and finally extinguish Israel at Masada. Jacob wanders, and in Rome, he joins other dissidents—plotting vengeance not by arms, but by the power of an idea. Paul of Tarsus, Josephus, the keepers of the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the historical Jesus himself each play a role in Jacob's tumultuous fortunes, but the women who have loved him compel the transforming and subversive climax.

9. There is theological content in *Logos*, but, speaking of genre, what is the difference between it and other historical novels that dramatize religious history, such as Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall*? What is the difference between *Logos* and other literary novels that dramatize oppressive government systems, such as George Orwell's *1984* or Adam Johnson's *The Orphan Master's Son*? Does this novel share characteristics with dystopian novels?

10. Is Jacob a hero of this story? If so, what sort of a hero is he? In what ways do his character traits fall short of a hero's qualities? Is he an anti-hero? Is there a tragic quality to the arc of Jacob's story and character development in this novel?

11. How do the violent and sensual scenes in the novel relate to plot-formulas familiar from epic poetry, such as the *Iliad* or the *Aeneid*, or popular culture such as the films *Ben-Hur* or *Gladiator*? How does *Logos* subvert these formulas?

12. What is the significance of Philo of Alexandria's "Logos" in this story? How does "Logos" fit into the development of Christianity? How is it still influential today?

13. What is the difference between Paul's interpretation of Jesus' life and that of James or old Joseph? Do James and old Joseph worship Jesus?

14. What is the significance to Hypatia of seeing the destruction of the Jewish community in Alexandria? How did this event influence her to turn to Paul's letters for solace and inspiration and to convert to Christianity? Does Hypatia have any specific religious convictions? Or is she more driven by convictions of common decency and humanism?

15. What are the sources of Jacob's dreams or surreal experiences or hallucinations? How would you characterize these scenes? Are they fantasy or plausible human experience?

16. What kind of a character is Tiberius? Is he at all sympathetic? What motivates him? Are his preoccupations solely self-interested, or does he have the good of humanity in mind as well? What is it that makes Jacob susceptible to his arguments and his vision?

17. In conjuring the historical Jesus on the page, what does Neeleman create, and what does he re-create from the historical record? What does Jacob re-create from Yeshua's biography that he learned from old Joseph in the cave?

18. How does the outcome of the Jewish rebellion against Rome and wars with Rome as depicted in this novel relate to the advent of Christianity? Of Islam? How did these events as depicted in this novel affect the Jewish mode of worship and Jewish communities? How is the aftermath of the Romans' destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish Temple as depicted in the novel felt to this day?

19. Late in the novel Tiberius says to Jacob: "Logos is order. Logos is balance, measure for measure. Wisdom is understanding the Logos." What does this mean in the context of this novel?

20. How do Biblical stories and epic poems such as the *Aeneid* and the *Iliad* affect Jacob's interpretation of his times and own life's events? How does this literature affect his reinterpretation of Yeshua's biography as told to him by old Joseph in the cave? How might legendary traditions have influenced Jacob in developing the first Gospel? What is the difference between myth and scripture? Are any of the novel's characters interested in the historical truth of scripture?

21. What impact do Jacob's childhood preparation in the Torah and the Classics alike, the Essene community, the beliefs of the Persian Magi, the practices of the Bedouins, the philosophy of the Hellenized Jews, Egyptian myth, his suffering, and his violent and sensual experiences have on the ultimate shape of his character?

22. How do you feel about this novel's dramatizations of religious practice? Whether or not you are religious, did you feel that these scenes provide any insight into the attraction of religious ceremony and tradition? What does Jacob's religion mean to him? How does that change?

23. Novelists and literature professors sometimes talk about novelistic truth and contrast it with historic truth. As a portrait of the advent of Christianity and the promulgation of the original Gospel, does this novel ring true for you?

24. Many novels that are admired contain controversial subject matter—material that some readers might find questionable or even objectionable. How might readers' religious belief or unbelief affect their reactions to this book?

25. The novel *Elementary Particles* by the French novelist Michel Holebeq states: "Metaphysical mutations--that is to say radical, global transformations in the values to which the majority subscribes—are rare in the history of humanity. . . . Once a metaphysical mutation has arisen, it tends to move inexorably toward its logical conclusion. Heedlessly, it sweeps away economic and political systems, aesthetic judgments and social hierarchies. No human agency can halt its progress--nothing except another metaphysical mutation." Is "Logos" as it arises in this novel an example of a metaphysical mutation?