

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO
THE WORLD'S GREATEST
SUPERHERO

STEPHEN
SKELTON

This PDF file contains copyrighted material.
Use of this file for any purpose other than viewing
on the Harvest House website is strictly prohibited.



HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS

EUGENE, OREGON

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. NIV®. Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984 by the International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

Verses marked *kjv* are taken from the King James Version of the Bible.

All emphasis in Scripture quotations has been added by the author.

Cover by Terry Dugan Design, Minneapolis, Minnesota

Cover photo © Eamon O'Donoghue

This book is not affiliated with or endorsed by the owners of the rights to the Superman character.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO THE WORLD'S GREATEST SUPERHERO

Copyright © 2006 by Stephen Skelton

Published by Harvest House Publishers

Eugene, Oregon 97402

www.harvesthousepublishers.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Skelton, Stephen, 1972-

The gospel according to the world's greatest superhero / Steve Skelton.

p. cm.

ISBN-13: 978-0-7369-1812-1 (pbk.)

ISBN-10: 0-7369-1812-4 (pbk.)

1. Superman films—Moral and ethical aspects. 2. Motion pictures—Religious aspects—Christianity. I. Title.

PN1995.9.S77S54 2006

791.43'651—dc22

2005035220

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, digital, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Printed in the United States of America

06 07 08 09 10 11 12 13 14 / DP-CF / 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

CONTENTS

Superman Timeline	8
List of Photos	10
Superman's Pal	11
PART ONE: REVELATIONS	
Chapter 1 The Greatest Story Ever Re-Told	19
Chapter 2 A Reflection to Be Recognized	25
Chapter 3 ...And God Created Superman.	35
PART TWO: ORIGIN	
Chapter 4 The One and Only Son	45
Chapter 5 The Star Child	53
Chapter 6 "You Are Here for a Reason"	63
PART THREE: MISSION	
Chapter 7 A Never-Ending Battle for Truth.	73
Chapter 8 Power in the Blood	85
Chapter 9 True Blue	95
Chapter 10 A Super Man	105
PART FOUR: DESTINY	
Chapter 11 Death	115
Chapter 12 Burial	129
Chapter 13 Resurrection	139
Chapter 14 Second Coming	149
Afterword: Jesus Christ, Superhero	157
Recommended Reading and Viewing/List of Sources	165
Notes	167

THE GREATEST STORY EVER RE-TOLD



Like many pals of the Man of Steel, for years I had heard rumors of superficial parallels between Superman and the Super Man, Jesus Christ. Although I'm inclined to find spiritual truth in worldly stories, for a long time I considered this an intriguing idea but one which was merely the opinion of those who chose to read that meaning into the story.

Then, a few years ago, I read a review of *Superman: The Movie* online at hollywoodjesus.com. The article, written by David Bruce, the creator of the Web site, began with the idea that people respond to Superman because he is a Christ figure—but then went on to outline incredible examples of how the gospel story was used as a template for the Superman story. By the time I had finished reading the review, this intriguing idea had graduated to an interesting argument.

Bruce's review spurred me to research that brought startling revelations. For instance, did you know that...

- * Superman and his father share the last name of *El*—the

Hebrew word for *God*. Thus in the Superman story, when “El” the father sends “El” the son down to Earth, “God” the father sends “God” the son down to Earth.

- * Superman’s earthly parents, Martha and Jonathan, were modeled after the biblical parents Mary and Joseph—and as I later discovered, *Mary* and *Joseph* were the original names of the earthly parents.
- * Superman’s enemy is a villain called Lex Luthor, a name suspiciously like *Lucifer*. And both figures are fueled by the same all-consuming, all-corrupting hunger for power and glory.

I found these to be just the tip of a Kryptonian iceberg.

The Parallels Unfold

If the comic-book version of man’s ancient question about the existence of a Higher Power asks, “Is it a bird? Is it a plane?” then the answer seemed clearer: “No, it’s Jesus!” However, within my early research, I was also challenged by counterarguments. The foremost objection is that the parallels of Superman to Christ are coincidental at best and forced at worst because the creators of Superman were Jewish.

Jerry Siegel, the writer, and Joe Shuster, the illustrator—two Jewish teenagers—undeniably deserve their “created by” credit (although what they have to say about their inspiration for Superman is striking in itself). Yet I also found that the Superman story as it’s popularly known is derived from a collection of works that is usually referred to as the Superman *canon* (a word loaded with religious symbolism)—and it was not told by only one person or even two.

For example, while Superman’s full origin story came together over several years from multiple sources, the first time Siegel and Shuster told the tale in a newspaper comic strip, it was only a handful of panels before their version had progressed from Krypton to Earth and the super-child had grown to a Superman, ready for his first super adventure. Further on, the scripters of the *Adventures*

of *Superman* television show were first to reveal that Superman's costume was created by Ma Kent from the blue, yellow, and red blankets in his spaceship.

In the early '40s, the Fleischer Studio produced a series of animated short films that added an essential scene, showing for the first time Clark Kent changing into Superman in a phone booth. The *Superman* radio show takes credit for the legendary motto "Faster than a speeding bullet! More powerful than a locomotive! Able to leap tall buildings in a single bound! Look, up in the sky! It's a bird! It's a plane! It's Superman!" Again, the radio scribes created the key characters of *Daily Planet* editor Perry White and cub reporter Jimmy Olsen. Momentously, it was the writers of the radio show who gave Superman his ability to fly—until that time, in the newspapers and comic books, he had merely jumped from place to place. And more pertinent to our purposes, I discovered that some of the storytellers in the Superman canon have deliberately worked to infuse the narrative with their religious, even Christic, intentions, as we will see.

As we follow the Superman story, we will see how it unfolds in many ways like the gospel story. That sequence also forms the progression of this book, which will deliver on its promise of revealing the many parallels between the two stories. In regard to the intentions of the creators, we will talk about the

The "Canon"

In this book, I have mostly focused on the main events of Superman's life, as drawn from a short roster of prominent sources that form the canonical story:

- early Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster stories (from 1938 on)
- *The Adventures of Superman* radio show (1940)
- the Superman animated short films by Max Fleischer (1941)
- *The Adventures of Superman* novel by George Lowther (1942)
- *The Adventures of Superman* television show with George Reeves (1952)
- *Superman: The Movie*, directed by Richard Donner and starring Christopher Reeve (1978)
- *Superman II* (1981)
- *The Man of Steel* comic-book miniseries by John Byrne (1986)
- the "Death of Superman" comic-book storyline (1992 to 1993)
- more recent influences from the *Smallville* television show (2001) and the *Superman Returns* movie (2006)

See also the timeline on pages 8–9.

Superman storytellers who deliberately worked from the Christ story. Those intentions aside, we will see how the Superman story on its own exhibits instances of gospel borrowing too numerous to discount.

Then, for Christians who doubt we should use entertainment to further the gospel, we will take a look at the biblical precedents for using religious, secular—even pagan—entertainments to reveal spiritual truth. Further, for the unconvinced, who perceive the same parallels between the Superman story and the stories of religions besides Christianity, we will find these parallels lack significance. There are distinctions that make a difference—how Christ differs from Buddha or Krishna reveals how Superman differs from these figures too.



Superman is not Jesus Christ. But he is a Christ figure, a figure resembling Christ—as we all should be. That said, the story of Superman bears some incredible parallels to the story of the Super Man, Jesus Christ. Similarly, our own story should also grow to resemble that of Christ as we live to follow him.

Perhaps you have mostly thought of Christ as the suffering lamb. Why not the universal Hero? Jesus is both—as we will use Superman to illustrate. Perhaps you've been looking for a path to follow in your spiritual life. Here you may realize whose story you have actually been responding to and may accept him more fully into your life. Or perhaps you've been looking for a better means to talk with people who are attracted to Superman but who don't know their true Savior is the Super Man, Jesus Christ. All those possibilities you will find in this book.

If the movie *Superman Returns* tells us anything, it tells us that the Superman story is still being told, as is the story of the Christ who will return. Think of this book, then, as a concise collection of the facts that show the essential parallels between Superman and the Son of Man. Because the gospel story is the

crucial story by which all humankind longs to define their lives, to the extent that the Superman story corresponds to the gospel story, the superhero from Krypton offers some soul's illumination, some heart's preparation. This is what I wish to communicate to you in *The Gospel According to the World's Greatest Superhero*, which is, I hope, at once a dim shadow and a bright reflection of the gospel of Jesus Christ.