

A Bible Journey

Describing the Gospels: **Matthew**

Date: Probably around 66AD or shortly after Mark
(assuming Mark was written first)

Authorship: Matthew the disciple (according to all early church writers)

“Matthew published his Gospel among the Hebrews in their own tongue, when Peter and Paul were preaching the gospel in Rome and founding the church there.” (Irenaus, approx.. 180AD, disciple of Polycarp, disciple of John the Apostle)

Characteristics:

- Presents Jesus as the Messiah promised in the Hebrew scriptures.
- Strong emphasis on the teachings of Jesus, presenting Him as the fulfillment of the Law.
- Urgency that the Gospel needs to go throughout the whole world.

Describing the Gospels: **Mark**

Date: Between 50 and 65AD by most estimates. Many believe that Mark was written first, before the other Gospels. (Matthew contains 90% of Mark, Luke 50%)

Authorship: Mark, associate of Paul and Peter. Strongly attested by early church writers.

“The Elder (John) said this also: Mark, who became Peter’s interpreter, wrote accurately, though not in order, all that he remembered of the things said or done by the Lord. For he had neither heard the Lord nor been one of his followers, but afterwards, as I said, he had followed Peter, who used to compose discourses with a view to the needs of his hearers, but not as though he were drawing up a connected account of the Lord’s sayings. So Mark made no mistake in thus recording some things just as he remembered them. For he was careful of this one thing, to omit none of the things he had heard and to make no untrue statements therein.: (Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History 3.39.15, quoting Papias, approx. 140AD)

Characteristics:

- Focuses on action to show though demonstrations of power that Jesus was the Son of God.
- One of the beauties of the Gospel of Mark lies in the details of how he presents events.

Describing the Gospels: **Luke**

Date: No later than 63AD (this applies to Acts also)

Authorship: Luke, Physician and companion of Paul, as attested by the early church. See also the prologues to Theophilus at the beginnings of Luke and Acts; and the “we” passages in Acts.

“Luke, the follower of Paul, set down in a book the gospel preached by his Teacher.” (Irenaus)

Characteristics:

- Emphasizes the humanness in Jesus’ nature.
- Shows his deep concern for the poor and disadvantaged.
- Focuses on the part of Jesus’ ministry that occurred in Judea.
- Careful use of source material.

Many people have set out to write accounts about the events that have been fulfilled among us. They used the eyewitness reports circulating among us from the early disciples. Having carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I also have decided to write an accurate account for you, most honorable Theophilus, so you can be certain of the truth of everything you were taught. (Luke 1:1-4)

Synoptic Gospels

- Matthew, Mark and Luke are called the Synoptic Gospels because they have a lot of information in common.
- There is a significant difference with Luke though, as we will see.
- While Matthew and Mark emphasize Jesus' ministry in Galilee, Luke focuses more on Jesus' time in Judea.
- Luke shows Jesus teaching in Judea, many of the same lessons that He taught earlier in Galilee.

Describing the Gospels: **John**

Date: Probably around 80 to 85 AD.

Authorship: John, according to ancient historians. The Gospel bears the marks of being an eyewitness account.

“John, the disciple of the Lord, who also had leaned upon his breast, had himself published a Gospel during his residence in Ephesus in Asia.” (Irenaus)

Characteristics:

- Powerfully Theological
 - The way to salvation is repeatedly presented.
 - The identities of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit along with the work and relationships with each other. (e.g. see John 1, 3, 5, 14, and 16.)
- Focuses on Jesus’ earlier journeys to Jerusalem.

One important factor to keep in mind when you are reading the Gospels is that the Gospel writers did not set out to write biographies on the life of Christ. Their sole aim was to present the teaching and work of Christ in a way that could lead a person to Faith. For this reason, many details that you normally find in a biography are left out. And they are not always concerned with the exact sequence of events. You find many times references along the lines of: “at about that time,” or “later”, or “as Jesus was walking...”

John puts it this way in his Gospel:

Now Jesus did many other things in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:30-31)

He goes on at the end to say:

This disciple is the one who testifies to these events and has recorded them here. And we know that his account of these things is accurate. Jesus also did many other things. If they were all written down, I suppose the whole world could not contain the books that would be written. (John 21:24-25)

Because the Gospel writers were concerned about presenting the case for Christ, and not about writing complete biographies, it is difficult to put together an exact timeline of every event in Jesus' life and ministry. Again, if a writer says something happened, "at about that time," we can't push for having every event nailed down in exact order.

But at the same time, there are enough historical clues in the Gospels, that we can arrive at a basic outline of Jesus' life and ministry. And when we go to study Jesus' life, it is helpful to have an outline of Jesus' ministry in our minds.

Phase 1: The Start of Jesus' Ministry in Galilee

Matthew and Mark focus heavily on Galilee-approx. 60%)

Baptism (Matthew 3, Mark 1)

Temptation (Matthew 4, Mark 1, Luke 4)

First Miracle (John 2:1-11)

Phase 2: Jerusalem at Passover (first journey)

Cleansing of the Temple (John 2:13-22)

Conversation with Nicodemus (John 3)

Woman at the well in Samaria (John 4:1-45)

Jesus also worked miracles there. (John 2:23-24)

A number of Jesus' disciples were with Him. (John 3:22)

John the Baptist was alive during this time. (John 3:23)

Phase 3: Core Ministry and Work in Galilee

Calling the first Disciples

Jesus' traveling ministry in Galilee

Calming the storm

Sending the disciples out

(Matthew chapters 4:12-13:58, Mark 1-6, Luke 4:14-9:9)

Phase 4: Second Journey to Jerusalem (During an unspecified feast time)

The core event is a healing that Jesus performs by the Pool of Bethesda on a man born paralyzed (John 5:1-9). Because Jesus heals this man on a Sabbath, it leads to a long, heated debate with the Jewish leaders. It is our first indication that there were those in leadership who wanted to kill Jesus. (John 5:18). This debate reveals much about Jesus's relationship to the Father and how that relationship determines his identity and everything that He does.

Phase 5: Galilee, Final Stage

Feeding the Five Thousand

Walking on Water

The Transfiguration

Matthew 14-18, Mark 6:30-9:50, Luke 9:10-50, John 6
(Jesus' feeding of the five thousand and walking on water
Are two of the very few events in the Synoptics that John
Includes.)

Phase 6: Into Judea. (Luke focuses almost 50% of his Gospel on this phase of Jesus' ministry in Judea)

Sending out the 72 (Luke 10:1-12)

Jerusalem (Feast of Tabernacles and Dedication, John 7-10)

Along the Jordan (Mt 19:1-20:16, Mk 10:1-13, Jn 10:40-42)

Personal encounters: Mary & Martha (Lk 10:3-42, Jn 11:1-12:8), Zaccheus (Lk 19), Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46)

Throughout Judea (Mt 20:17-34, Mk 10:32-52, Lk 9:51-19:27)

Phase 7: Holy Week and the Crucifixion

Triumphal Entry

Cleansing the Temple

Maundy Thursday (Last Supper)

Good Friday (Crucifixion)

Matthew 21-28, Mark 11-15, Luke 19:28-23:56, Jn 12:12-19:42

About 40% of John is focused on this week.

The Identity of Christ

Christ – Anointed One

Isaiah 61 (see Luke 4:18, Acts 10:36-38)

Son of Man

Daniel 7:13 (Jesus refers to Himself as Son of Man
Approximately 40 separate times in the Bible.)

Son of God (Occurs about 20 times)

As *the* Son of God, this points to Jesus' equality with
God. See John 1:14 and John 5:18

The Word – Creator and Savior

John 1:1-5 and 14

The Way to Eternal Life

Out of all the Gospels it's in John that we find Jesus teaching the most explicitly on eternal life. Here we find Jesus addressing the topic with dogged repetition. (17 times)

John 3:15-16, and 36
John 4:14, and 36
John 5:24, and 39-40
John 6:27, 40, 47, 54, and 68
John 10:28
John 12:25 and 50
John 17:2-3

The Holy Spirit

Teaching on the Holy Spirit is especially significant in Luke and John.

Together, the Gospels show us that Jesus relied on the Holy Spirit for everything that He did; just as we are called to do.

Luke 1:35 Conceived and born of the Spirit
Luke 3:21-22, and Luke 4:1 Commissioned and filled by the Spirit
Luke 4:1 Led by the Spirit
Luke 4:14, Matthew 12:28 Empowered by the Spirit
Romans 8:11. Raised the Son from the dead

The Holy Spirit

Teaching on the Holy Spirit is especially significant in Luke and John.

In John, we get extensive teaching on the work of the Spirit in the world and in our lives.

- John 3:4-8: He gives us new birth.
- John 4:13-14, 7:37-39: Continually nourishes, refreshes, and sustains us.
- John 14:15-17, 25-26: The Holy Spirit as our Helper within us.
- John 15:26: He will work along side us to proclaim Christ.
- John 16:7: Christ sends the Helper after his ascension.
- John 16:8-11: He will convict the world of their need for Christ.
- John 16:13: He will guide us in the truth.

The Sermon on the Mount

Matthew Chapters 5 through 7

Guidelines for life in the Kingdom of God.

The Parables

Principles for How to Interpret Parables:

- There is usually one, central point.
- Notice the audience Jesus is speaking to, and the context. (See Luke 15:1-2 before Prodigal Son parable)
- Note how much space is given to the various characters.
- (See Prodigal Son parable in Luke 15:11-32)
- Notice what is emphasized at the end. (See Luke 15:25-32)

The Cost of Discipleship

Then he said to the crowd, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross daily, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it. And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but are yourself lost or destroyed? (Luke 9:23-25)

"The cross is laid on every Christian. The first Christ-suffering, which every man must experience is the call to abandon the attachments of this world. It is that dying of the old man which is the result of his encounter with Christ. As we embark upon discipleship, we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with his death- we give over our lives to death. Thus it begins; the cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise god-fearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ.

When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die."

(Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* p.990)