

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW

Audience: Aimed mostly at a Jewish Audience. This is evident in language that Matthew uses that would be more particular to the Jews than Gentiles for example using “kingdom of heaven” instead of “kingdom of God” and using “holy city” rather than “Jerusalem”. The author also assumes that the readers know Jewish law (7:12, 6:31) and know the traditions of the elders (7:15). Whereas, the author of Mark explains Jewish traditions to his audience.

Dating: Is uncertain, many scholars date it as late as 85-110 A.D.

Purpose

- To promote faith in Jesus as the Messianic Son of David, this is evident in the healing stories.
- Convince people that Jesus was the Messiah who fulfilled OT Prophecies. Some examples: Virgin birth (1:22-33; Isaiah 14), Birth in Bethlehem (2:5-6; Mic. 5:2), Jesus’ return from Egypt (2:15, Hos. 11:1), Herod’s killing of male children (2:16-18, Jer. 31:15), Jesus Living in Nazareth (2:23, Zech 9:9), and the price of Jesus’ life (27:9-10, Jer. 32:6-15; 18:2-3; Zech. 11:12-13).
- Written for the church possibly as a new distillation of the law. (Incidentally, this is the only gospel that actually uses the term “church”)
- A document easy to use to refer to matters of faith, conduct and worship.

Miscellaneous Characteristics

Matthew **sometimes tones down or omits things** in Mark that might cause offense or misunderstanding. He tends to trim out emotions. For example, Matthew excludes phrases such as, “moved with pity”, “he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart”, “he sighed deeply in his spirit” and “he was indignant.” These emotional details are left out when Matthew recounts stories that appear in the gospel of Mark.

The whole Gospel seems to be **arranged around 5 core discourse** (blocks of teaching) that typically follow a pattern of: introductory narrative, opening formula, closing formula, and then the discourse.

Matthew’s writing style is rather unique as well. For example, Matthew frequently repeats the same or similar phrases, such as, “and when Jesus had finished”, “weeping and gnashing of teeth”, “going to hell” and “the kingdom of Heaven is like.”

Matthew also seems to **like things in threes**; for example, three signs of righteousness—alms, prayer, and fasting, three negative commands (6:19-7:6) and three positive commands (7:7-20), three parables of sowing, three hopes, and three petitions in the Lord’s prayers.

Thing to Consider: Some of the largest bodies of direct teaching of Jesus appear in the Gospel of Matthew. The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) is perhaps the most commonly recognized discourse by Jesus. As you read Jesus teaching strive to ask the question, “How does this apply to my life today?”

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARK

Background

The earliest and most reliable information we have about the origin of the Gospel of Mark comes from Papias ca. A.D. 125. According to Papias, this gospel was written by John Mark a companion of Paul and later Peter. It was written around A.D. 65 shortly following the deaths of Paul and Peter. According to Papias it was intended to be read by the church in Rome. So as you are reading it keep in mind that this Gospel was most likely written for a Gentile, that is to say, a non-Jewish audience. Also, it would have been an extremely persecuted audience.

Themes and Features:

- Mark **moves quickly**. You are going to see the word “immediately” over and over again.
- This Gospel relates Jesus ministry from his Baptism up through his resurrection.
- A full one-quarter of the book is spent on the details of the last week of his life. There is a strong sense of **Jesus as a servant willing to suffer** if necessary. A message that would have been inspiring for Mark’s roman audience who was being harshly persecuted.
- Lots of Stories in Mark reveal **Jesus authority**. Watch for what Jesus has authority over.
- Secrecy. Jesus frequently tells people not to spread the word about him after he performs a miracle. There is a lot of speculation as to why Jesus did this. Watch for this recurring theme. Why do you think Jesus wants people to not talk about him?

Mark begins his Gospel by announcing Jesus coming as the fulfillment of a prophecy from Isaiah. As you read Mark consider how Jesus is the fulfillment of what God sought to do in the life of Israel through the law.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO LUKE

Author: Luke the physician, who sometimes traveled with Paul.

Date: Uncertain.

Audience: The gospel is addressed to Theophilus. He is not mentioned anywhere else in the New Testament. The content appears to be oriented at Gentile Christians.

Purpose

Luke explicitly tell us that he is writing in order to create an orderly account of the events of Jesus life as presented by eyewitnesses, so that people will know the truth about what they have heard. (Luke 1:1-4) Luke includes many details that other gospel writers do not. For example, Luke includes details about the dating of specific events. Theologically, it appears that Luke wants to make it abundantly clear that God’s messiah has come to his people, Israel, in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy and that the Gentiles are to be included in the fulfillment of God’s promises. The Holy Spirit plays prominently in the fulfillment of God’s promises.

Prevalent Themes

The poor and the marginalized. Luke includes a diverse number of stories about people who would have been marginalized during Jesus' time: women, widows, the poor, tax collectors, sinners, shepherds, the physically disabled or infirmed, lepers and Samaritans. Some of the stories unique to Luke include:

- Jesus raising a widow's son (7:11-17)
- Parable of the Rich Fool (12:13-21)
- Jesus heals a bent woman (13:10-17)
- Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (16:19-31)
- The thief on the cross (23:42-43)

Women

Women play a larger role in the gospel of Luke than any other gospel. Again his gospel contains some unique stories about women:

- Women disciples mentioned (8:2-3)
- Story of Mary and Martha (10:38)
- Jesus' words from the cross to the "daughters of Jerusalem" (23:28)

He also spends significant time recounting Mary and Elizabeth's roles at the beginning of the gospel.

Things to consider

Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of prophecy. God had in mind centuries before Jesus birth a plan of salvation for God's people. The early Christians were able to speak persuasively about Jesus Christ from just the Old Testament scriptures. Do you know the scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, well enough to explain God's promises, who Jesus is and how he is a fulfillment of those promises?

During Jesus' time, many customs separated the poor and physically infirmed from other people. Many traditions also kept tax collectors, sinners and foreigners outside the norms of the religious community. Jesus seems to have ignored many of these boundaries and went where there was need despite those restrictions. In what ways do you distance yourself from people in need? What people are you uncomfortable being around? Why? What are their needs and how could you meet those needs despite your fears or prejudices?

The Holy Spirit speaks to people and plays a prominent role throughout the Gospel of Luke. What has been your experience of the Holy Spirit? How do you see it at work in your life? The Holy Spirit is a gift from God, given to you to comfort, convict, instruct, and lead you. Paul says in a letter to Timothy, "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but of power, love and self-control." (2 Timothy 1:7) That is a wonderful succinct way for Paul to capture in words what it meant for him to have the gift of the Holy Spirit. In your own words, what does it mean for you to have the gift of the Holy Spirit?

Lastly, gospel stories are intended to not only just recount the facts of what happened in Jesus life, but to help us understand, believe and follow Jesus Christ. What does the Gospel of Luke teach you about who Jesus is? How does this help you understand, believe in and follow Jesus Christ better?

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN

The Gospel of John reads very differently from Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Those three gospels are frequently referred to as the synoptic gospels. Those three Gospels seem to share a similar point of view and appear to have even drawn upon one another. John on the other hand, stands a part.

The Gospel of John is frequently given to new believers, perhaps because it's core theme is belief. John points strongly toward Jesus as the promised Messiah and Son of God. The gospel is focused on belief in Jesus as the source of eternal life.

Author

There is both internal and external evidence that this Gospel was authored by the Apostle John, the son of Zebedee. Internal evidence is a term reference to clues from the text that validate a theory about the text. There are many references within this Gospel that point toward John as the Author. External clues are things like, commentaries from the earlier church fathers that support the identification of John as the author.

Where and when was it written?

Most scholars suspect that John was written between 70 and 100 A.D. But there are few clues pointing to anything specific. Biblical scholars suspect that John was written in most likely in Ephesus in Asia Minor.

Audience

John, a Palestinian Jew, seems to have a mixed audience. He spends a great deal of time on revealing Jesus as the Jewish Messiah, but he also translates aramaic terms into Greek and utilizes Greco-Roman concepts about the "the Word" to communicate effectively to an audience that obviously was at least in part, Greek

What to watch for as you read

John is big on wanting to reveal Christ as the son of God and long awaited messiah. As you read, when every see the words **Messiah** or **Son of God** slow down and look at what John is sharing. What signs does John share with the readers to help them believe.

Also, whenever you see the word "**belief**" or some derivative of it, slow down and look at what John wants people to believe and why. How does the Gospel of John effect your own belief?

Salvation is also an important term in the Gospel. When you see the Word salvation or John talks about being saved. Pay attention. Who is saved and from what?