

Our Source about Jesus - The Books of the Gospel

Introduction to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John

There are scant references to Christ's life and ministry by secular historians. Even the Epistles and the Old Testament tell us little about this part of the person of Christ. Our primary source about the words and works of Jesus is found in the Gospel books. (2 Peter 1:21; 2 Timothy 3:16)

The Gospel According to Matthew

Author & Background: (Unlike the Epistles the Gospel books do not name their authors. We know the authorship through Christian tradition and careful examination of the book.) Matthew the apostle is the undisputed author of the book that bears his name. All internal evidence points to a close eyewitness. Matthew, a tax collector turned follower of Christ, had many abilities and interests that both helped and are evident in his book. He would have known a type of shorthand, helpful recording long discourses and parables. His book has frequent mentions of money, specific large sums are highlighted, and the author often acknowledging statistics.

Date: (Internal evidence is the only way we can date a Gospel book.) Most theologians believe this was written fairly early, before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. I saw as early as 50 AD to 60-65 AD.

Theme and Purpose: Matthew's aim is the further evangelism of unbelieving Jews and the spiritual growth of those large numbers of Jews converted in the early days of the church. Over 100 times Matthew will reference the Old Testament and will show Christ's direct fulfilment of prophecies over 40 times. JV McGee says this about the book of Matthew, "(It) Swings back in the Old Testament and gathers up more Old Testament prophecies than any other book" JVMcG pg. 3

"Kingdom of God" is a theme. The Sermon on the Mount, Olivet Discourse, and numerous parables directly teach God's mind on this subject. Jesus would be proven to be the rightful King for the throne of David.

"church" – Matthew is the only Gospel book that uses the word "church" (2x) – Gk "called out assembly". Matthew is certainly a bridge between the Old and New Testament.

Warren Wiersbe said about the Apostle Matthew, "He introduced a new book. That book was the New Testament. If a Bible reader were to jump from Malachi into Mark, or Acts, or Romans, he would be bewildered. Matthew's gospel is the bridge that leads us out of the Old Testament and into the New Testament." WW p. 10

Interesting Features: 1) The content of Mark to Matthew is very close. 2) The apostle Matthew is never quoted in any Gospel book but he wrote a whole Gospel! 3) The book of Matthew is topical not chronological. As Matthew recorded shared various topics he would use events and discourses to support them.

Well-Known Verses: Matthew 5:17; 2:2; 4:17

The Gospel According to Mark:

Author & Background: Again, ancient testimony assigned John Mark as the author of the Gospel of Mark and it was never seriously challenged. Mark was from Jerusalem, it was in his mother's house, Mary, that the early Christians meet to pray for Peter when he was in jail. This gives cause for us to believe that he came from a wealthy home. Mark was the cousin of Barnabas (Col. 4:10) and had deserted Paul during the first missionary journey. Later in Paul's ministry, Paul wrote and said that John Mark had become a helpful part of the ministry. (2 Tim. 4:11)

Date: Mark is one of the earliest New Testament books. It is written as an eyewitness account to Jesus' ministry. I found dates from as early as the 40's to as late as 65 AD. Most agree it was written while Mark was in Rome.

Theme and Purpose: The book of Mark was written to a Roman audience. Mark desired to impress the Roman Gentiles with the power of Christ and the effect the Gospel had on the lives Jesus touched. Christ was presented as the "Servant of God to humanity". Though this book has no full sermons it does have the most recorded miracles of Christ. Like the Romans this book dealt with facts, fast-paced action that supported Mark's thesis of "Christ the Servant".

Interesting Features: 1) No genealogies and few Old Testament references are found in Mark due to the Roman audience. 2) When studying Peter's sermons and writings an influence is noted. "Marcus my son" - (I Peter 5:13) It has been called the "Memoirs of Peter". 3) Christ centered 4) Action-packed – the word "immediate" or "straightway" is used about 40 times; very brief and blunt style 5) Concise – only 16 chapters; the last five chapters deal with the last week of Jesus 6) Not chronological or topic but rather locations are highlighted and covered 7) Less than one chapter of Mark is unique

Well-Known Verses: Mark 10:45 (42-45)

The Gospel According to Luke:

Author & Background: Luke is named three times in the New Testament as a faithful companion of Paul. It is believed that Luke was a Gentile, and it is recorded in Col. 4:14 ("beloved physician) that he was a doctor. Like in the other two Gospel books, Luke is also not named within the book as the author, but Christian tradition has never been successfully challenged on this point. Luke was not an eyewitness to the life of Christ but instead he was a careful historian and preserver of facts. He wrote concerning the witnesses that he had interviewed. Luke was also a theologian, for he would often be an expositor of the meaning of facts. Luke wrote in the best literary style of the Greek language, even better than Paul. My study Bible notes say this about the book of Luke, "[*The book of Luke is the*] most attractive in style and poignant in message that we possess." Dr. Luke also wrote two volumes of history concerning Jesus, the Son of God and His church. The book of Luke and Acts; these make up over a quarter of the New Testament!

Date: The book of Luke is believed to have been written in Caesarea or Rome around 60 AD. It is believed that Acts very likely was written back-to-back with the book of Luke. This would place the date of Acts around 62 AD as Acts ends with Paul in prison.

Theme and Purpose: Unlike Matthew and Mark, Luke makes his objectives to writing his book very clear in Luke 1:1-4. 1) a fuller account than had already been written – adding to the accounts of Matthew and Mark to show more of the wonderful events of the life and ministry of Christ – From Luke we have the most complete account of Jesus’ life 2) To help confirm Theophilus’ faith. This book is both evangelistic and sanctification based. Luke presents Jesus as the Son of Man.

Interesting Features: 1) Luke was the only Gentile writer of the Gospels 2) He adapted and interpreted Jewish traditions for his Gentile readers – calculating dates and time, genealogy of Jesus, explained the attitude to of Jews to Roman government 3) Uses 266 words not found in other Gospels – elevated literary style 4) The word “salvation” – 5 times/ John – 1 time absent in Matthew and Mark 5) Deals with more individuals, highlighting the lower classed people in the minds of society – woman, children, poor, tax collectors, Gentiles, Samaritans, sinners, outcasts 6) Stresses the Holy Spirit 7) Gospel of Prayer – many prayers are recorded 8) Luke was the longest Gospel 9) Repentance, faith, and forgiveness is emphasized 10) Most complete nativity story recorded 11) 20 miracles – 6 unique to Luke 12) Book of Parables – 23 with 18 unique to Luke 13) Bodily resurrection is emphasized 14) Emphasized the role of women in the life and ministry of Jesus

Well-Known Verses: Luke 19:9-10; 2:10, 32

Synoptic Gospels – Matthew, Mark, & Luke They describe events, or the works and words of Jesus, in a similar fashion

The Book of John is different. He will write a doctrinal book to convince the deity of Christ. In it he uses the works and words of Jesus to prove the fact that Jesus came to earth as the Son of God and believing you might have life through His name!

The Gospel According to John:

Author & Background: Both strong hints within the writing (John 21:20, 24) and credible traditional writing credit the book to John the beloved disciple.

Date: The book of John is the last of the Gospels. It seems to be agreed among theologians that it was written between 80-85 AD. By the time it was written, the Epistles of Paul and the other three Gospels were well known and used among the churches. 30-50 years later, John’s Gospel joined the books quoted by early Christian pastors.

Theme and Purpose: The book of John was written for both the Jew and the Gentile. He spent time to interpret words for the Gentiles and for the Jews revealed Old Testament prophecies fulfilled and types of the Messiah found in Jesus. The purpose of John is given within the book in John 20:30-31 – belief that Jesus was the Son

of God, other words, evangelism. Jesus' deity is referenced by being called: "God" – 2x; "Son of God" – 10x; equated with the Father – 4x; calls God "Father" – 116x (more than the other gospels combined), Jesus always says "My Father", "your Father", or "the Father" but never "Our Father"; stated that He never sinned – 4x; attributes of God are given to Him – 7x; and He declares that He was "I am". The deity of Christ is foundational to the book of John. He uses only 8 miracles (6 of them unique to John) and the teachings that accompany them to support his purpose – convincing the reader that Jesus was the Son of God and seeing them believe! But it cannot be denied that much of the book deals with solely believers' issues – Holy Spirit's coming, Christ the True Vine, Peter's restoration, Christ's return for His own. This is a deeply spiritual book, the product of a mature follower and eyewitness of Christ that had years to meditate and be taught by the Holy Spirit concerning the things which he had seen and heard!

Interesting Features: 1) Key Words: "signs" – 17x often translated "miracles" – other gospels 28x; "believe" – 98x, often the belief is based on the signs – other gospels 29x; "life" – 34x often closely related to faith – other gospels 13x; 2) Because of the spiritual depth and large portions that are key to believer's, two respected theologians I read regularly agreed that if one was going to give out a copy of just one Gospel book for the purpose of evangelism, Luke or Mark would be better choice. 3) An event or miracle is followed by a discourse from Jesus 4) It is John's gospel that give us a three-year ministry timetable of Christ. He includes 3 Passovers and feasts Jesus attended the others only mention one Passover. 5) John gave us information about Jesus' first year of ministry in Judea and Jerusalem. The other gospels are almost silent about that year while they spend much time about the Galilean ministry. 6) The book of John becomes supplemental to the first three Gospels – 90% is unique material! Yet John did not mention any genealogy, the birth of Christ, His childhood, temptation, transfiguration, appointment of disciples, no parables, no ascension, or Great Commission! 7) John is known for his built-in commentary as he shares events in the life of Christ. He tells us what is meant by Jesus' words, or what the disciples or crowd was thinking. 8) Peter and John are together 6 times 9) No parables are found in John (John 10:6 – different Gk word then parable) 10) Profound doctrine in simple words – "ye in me, and I in you" salvation and sanctification taught in 7 words! 11) John proves to be more chronological than the other gospels 12) The name of "Jesus" is used almost entirely, not "Christ" 13) While the other Gospel books call John by name app. 20x, the book of John never mentions him

Well-Known Verses: John 20:30-31; 1:11, 14

"All (Gospel writers) interpreted the ministry and life of Jesus from different angles, that the picture might be complete, and the world might see Jesus."

JW Shepard

Believer's Application:

If the Gospels are the main source of our knowledge of Jesus, let's become very familiar with them! Let's be students of the Christ in the Gospels! Four men, from different cultures, backgrounds, even at different stages of life share with us Jesus!

Peter challenges his readers to gain knowledge of Jesus. He tells us why in 2 Peter 1:3.

1. In Christ we find life – eternal and abundant life

2. In Christ we find godliness – learning to live god-like ultimately ready for the service of the gospel.

Peter finished 2 Peter admonishing the reader to grow! To grow in their knowledge of Jesus! 2 Peter 3:18
It is that important, and that knowledge is primarily found in the Gospels!