

**Four Gospels – Matthew, Mark Luke, John**  
**Three Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke)**

**Historical Background Issues:**

GOSPEL acc. to...	MARK	MATTHEW	LUKE	JOHN
<i>WHO?</i>  <i>traditionally attributed author?</i>	"John Mark of Jerusalem" (Acts 12:12; 15:37; Col 4:10; Phlm 1:24; 1Pet 5:13)	tax collector & apostle (Mark 3:18; Matt 9:9; 10:3; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13)	physician & companion of Paul (Col 4:14; 2Tim 4:11; Phlm 1:24 only)	John, son of Zebedee; one of 12 apostles (Mark 1:19; 3:17; cf. John 21:2)
<i>WHO?</i>  <i>implied author?</i>	bilingual (Aramaic & Greek) Christian of the 2nd generation; "young man" of 14:51-52?	multi-lingual (Aramaic & Greek) early Jewish Christian; trained "scribe" of 13:52?	Gentile Christian convert; well educated Greek "historian"; client of Theophilus (1:1-4)?	the "beloved disciple" and his Jewish Christian followers (19:35; 21:20-24)
<i>TO WHOM?</i>  <i>implied audience?</i>	mostly Gentiles, fairly new in their faith, and facing persecutions	better educated Jews who believe in Jesus, but argue over the Law	wealthier Gentile Christians in an urban setting, becoming complacent	very mixed: mostly Jews, some Gentiles, Samaritans, etc.
<i>WHERE?</i>  <i>written from and/or to?</i>	probably Rome; possibly Decapolis, Syria or Alexandria?	possibly Galilee; probably in or near Antioch in Syria	probably Greece; possibly Syria/Antioch (Pauline missions)	originally Galilee or Syria; traditionally Ephesus (Asia Minor)
<i>WHEN?</i>  <i>approximate date?</i>	first written "Gospel"; very late 60's or early 70's (Jewish War 66-70)	late 70's or 80's (w/ older sources, incl. one written by Matthew?)	mid to late 80's (incl. "many" earlier written sources)	main edition 90's (early edition 50's? epilogue after 100?)
<i>WHAT?</i>  <i>subtype of "Gospel" genre?</i>	narrated "good news" (1:1) about Jesus, esp. his actions & his death	book of "heritage" of Jesus (1:1) & much of his "teaching" (28:20)	an "orderly account" for attaining "secure knowledge" (1:1-4)	much "testimony" and "signs" for believers (20:30-31; 21:24-25)
<i>WHY? community circumstances &amp; author's purpose?</i>	to encourage a group undergoing difficult trials and persecutions	to teach a community with internal divisions and external enemies	to challenge believers to put their faith into practice more fully	to strengthen a group ostracized by other Jews for their faith

## Literary, Stylistic and Thematic Comparisons:

GOSPEL acc. to...	MARK	MATTHEW	LUKE	JOHN
<i>Number of chapters (verses and words)</i>	16 ( 678 / 11304 )	28 ( 1071 / 18345 )	24 ( 1151 / 19482 )	21 ( 879 / 15635 )
<i>Style of Greek</i>	grammatically poor Greek	Semitic influenced Greek	good, elegant, literary Greek	simple, but highly symbolic Greek
<i>Geographical Focus</i>	Galilean towns & villages; some Gentile territory	Galilee, esp. mountains; mostly Jewish areas	one long journey to the goal: Jerusalem	multiple visits back & forth to Jerusalem
<i>Literary Features</i>	quick action ("and then"; "immediately");  episodes connected loosely, but grouped	five major discourses; well-organized sections of collected pericopes	any story pairs (with male/female characters);  focus on prayer; many extra parables	"Amen, Amen, I say to you."; irony; paradox; double-meanings
<i>Literary Introduction</i>	"Beginning of Good News" (1:1)	"Book of Genealogy" (1:1)	"Orderly Account" (1:1-4)	Cosmic Hymn (1:1-18)
<i>Gospel Beginning</i>	John the Baptist's preaching;  Jesus' ministry begins (1:2-15)	Jesus' heritage: David (royal), Abraham (Jewish), Emmanuel (God with us) (1:2-2:23)	parallel birth stories: John the Baptist & Jesus (1:5-2:52)	J. B. points to "Lamb of God"; first disciples come (1:19-51)
<i>First Words of Jesus</i>	[to unspecified crowds]: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news" (1:15)	[to John the Baptist, before his baptism]: "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness" (3:15)	[12-year-old, to his parents in Jerusalem]: "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (2:49)	[to two disciples of John the Baptist]: "What are you looking for?" (1:38) and "Come and See" (1:39)
<i>Birth of Jesus (narrative emphasis)</i>	Jesus' birth is not narrated; but he's called "Son of Mary" (6:3) and "the Nazarene" (14:67)	focus on men: David, Joseph, Herod, Magi; power: King of Jews? murder of infants!	focus on women: Elizabeth, Mary, Anna; angels; shepherds; Holy Spirit	theology of incarnation: "Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (1:14)
<i>Inaugural Event</i>	Exorcism in the Synagogue of Capernaum (1:21-28)	Sermon on the Mount: Fulfillment of Torah/Law (ch. 5-7)	Jubilee reading from Isaiah 61: Rejection at Nazareth (4:14-30)	Wedding Feast at Cana: first of Jesus' "signs" (2:1-11)
<i>Jesus' Major Opponents</i>	1- Pharisees & Herodians;  2- chief priests, scribes & elders	"scribes & Pharisees";  "hypocrites & blind guides"	unjust authorities (civil & religious);  rich & corrupt people	"the Jews" (esp. leaders in Jerusalem);  Pharisees; High Priest Caiaphas

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<i>Jesus' [Seven] Last Words on the Cross</i>	"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (15:34)	[same as in Mark]  (Mt 27:46)	"Father, forgive them..." (23:34);  "You will be with me in Paradise" (23:43);  "Father, into your hands I commend my Spirit" (23:46)	"Woman, behold, your son"; "Behold, your mother" (19:26-27);  "I am thirsty" (19:28);  "It is finished" (19:30)
<i>Focus of Passion</i>	horrible suffering; tragic death (ch. 14–15)	authorities' plots & treachery (ch. 26-27)	Jesus' innocence; forgiveness (ch. 22–23)	Jesus' exaltation/glorification (ch. 18–19)
<i>Last Major Event</i>	Empty Tomb, outside of Jerusalem (16:1-8)	Great Commission, on Mountain in Galilee (28:16-20)	Ascension, from Bethany just East of Jerusalem (24:50-53)	1: disciples & Thomas (20:19-29) 2: [Peter & Beloved Disciple (21:1-23)]
<i>Final Literary Ending</i>	women leave tomb in fear & silence (16:8) [16:9-20 added only later]	Jesus tells the disciples, "I am with you always" (28:20)	disciples return to Jerusalem temple with joy praising God (24:53)	1: many more signs (20:30-31) 2: [many other books, 21:24-25]
<i>Christology I: Main Titles for Jesus</i>	Christ/Messiah & Son of God;  Suffering Son of Man;  Eschatological Judge	Son of David; Son of Abraham; King of the Jews; New Lawgiver & Great Teacher (like Moses);  Emmanuel ("God with us")	great Prophet (in word & deed);  Lord (of Israel, and of all nations);  Savior (of all, but esp. of the poor)	Eternal Logos; Divine Word made Flesh; Only-begotten Son; sent from Father; Passover Lamb; "I Am" / "Equal to God"
<i>Christology II: Jesus' Major Actions</i>	miracles; overcoming evil powers;  arguing with religious authorities	teaching his disciples;  decrying religious hypocrisy	healing sick & impaired people;  forgiving sinners & debtors	speaking God's words; doing God's works; revealing his intimate relationship with God
<i>Discipleship I: Teachings about Disc.</i>	persevere in faith despite suffering; follow Jesus "on the way" to the cross; be ready for his return	be righteous; forgive always; live ethically (Golden Rule); fulfill God's commands, esp. in charitable deeds	leave everything to follow Jesus; share with poor; accept everyone, esp. outcasts, women, enemies	see, believe, know, remain in Jesus & God, despite hostility; love one another; be in unity; serve humbly
<i>Discipleship II: Role Models for Disc.</i>	anon. women (5:25; 7:24; 12:41; 14:3);  Jairus (5:21);  Bartimaeus (10:46)	Peter (16:13-20);  children (18:1-5);  faithful servants (24:45–25:46)	Mary of Nazareth (1:26–2:51);  Good Samaritan (10:25-37);  Zacchaeus (19:1-10)	John [the Baptizer] (ch. 1); man born blind (ch. 9); Martha (11:27); the B.D. (13:23ff); Mary Magdalene (20:1-18)
<i>Pneumatology</i>	Spirit descends at Jesus' Baptism;  conflict with unclean/demonic spirits	Mary with child from the H.S.;  God's Spirit in Jesus' actions & speech	H.S. esp. active in Infancy Narrative;  Jesus receives prophetic anointing	H.S. as Spirit of Truth;  Paraclete/Advocate/Comforter

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<i>Eschatological Expectations</i>	imminent and suddenly, but no one knows when; so "Keep awake!" (13:1-37)	false prophets will arise; many will fall away; Gospel must first be preached to all (24:10-14)	after Jerusalem is destroyed & Gentiles' time is fulfilled; not so soon; pray! (21:20-24, 28, 36)	realized eschatology; all who hear & believe have eternal life already now, are not judged (5:21-25)
<i>Basis for Final Judgment</i>	whether you persevere in faith despite persecutions (13:13)	what you do for "the least" people; Sheep & Goats parable (25:31-46)	how you use wealth / possessions; parables of Rich & Poor (16:1-31)	whether or not you believe in Jesus  (3:16-18; 5:19-24; 12:44-50)
<i>Other Major Themes</i>	Messianic secret; main disciples don't understand, but minor characters do believe	fulfillment of Scripture; divisions within the community; final separation of good vs. bad	fulfillment of God's plan; eschatological reversal; tax collectors & sinners favored	"eternal life" = "life in his name"; Paraclete = Holy Spirit; Christian unity; mutual indwelling of God/Jesus/us
<i>Evang. Symbols (cf. Rev 4:7)</i>	Lion	Human [or Angel]	Ox	Eagle
<i>Liturgical Feast Day</i>	25-Apr	21-Sep	18-Oct	27-Dec
<i>Use in Sunday Lectionary</i>	Year B	Year A	Year C	mixed, esp. Lent & Easter
<i>Typical Portrait</i>	Jesus on the Cross	Sermon on the Mount	Jesus Heals the Sick	Christ the Revealer
<i>Emphasized by Whom?</i>	Modern Historians (oldest historical account)	Catholics (esp. ecclesial structures)	Protestants (esp. social justice focus)	Orthodox Xns (esp. logos Christology)