

## The GOSPEL

The four gospels and the book of Acts provide a written record of the origins of Christianity. The story of Jesus is sometimes called the “greatest story every told” — and it’s a story told four times in what we know as the “gospels.” “Gospel” is actually from the Old English, originally “Good (or God) Spell” — a translation of the Greek word *euaggelion* meaning “good news.” In the first century, imperial decrees from Caesar were referred to as “good news.” The Gospel writers took the word and used it for the ultimate “imperial” announcement from the throne of Almighty God: the Good News that the kingdom (reign) of God is at hand in the person and presence of Jesus of Nazareth; the Good News that the Word which was with God and was God became flesh and dwelt among us; the Good News that in Jesus, the long-awaited Messiah of Israel, God is reconciling the world to himself and that by faith in Him we have access to a full-on, intimate, eternal relationship with God Himself.

### Not just a Biography...

The Gospels are not merely biographies of Jesus in the strict sense of the word. They are accurate accounts of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, but they weren’t written to inform readers. They want us to believe. These were the original “evangelistic tracks.” Each writer carefully selected events, miracles and teachings and then arranged them in such a way — each with a different “target” audience in mind — that we would be drawn to Jesus as Lord. As the writer of the fourth Gospel says it: “These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, and that, believing, you might have life in his name.”

### The SYNOPTIC Gospels

The word “synoptic” means to “see in the same way.” We traditionally have referred to the first three Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) as the “Synoptic Gospels” because they each incorporate similar features in their accounts of Jesus — parables, miracles and key events. John’s Gospel was written last and has a very different flow to it. Mark is the simplest telling of the story — a “just the facts ma’am” approach. Matthew includes almost the entire Gospel of Mark but arranges his material differently. About 30 percent of Matthew’s Gospel is unique to Matthew.



Day	Start	End	✓
71	Matthew 26:57	Mark 9:13	—
72	Mark 9:17	Luke 1:80	—
73	Luke 2:1	Luke 9:62	—
74	Luke 10:1	Luke 20:19	—
75	Luke 20:20	John 5:47	—
76	John 6:1	John 15:17	—
77	John 15:18	Acts 6:7	—

### Gospel Vocabulary

Here are some key terms and concepts we come across as we read the Gospels:

#### Gospel

From the Old English “Good Spell (news).” It’s the good news about Jesus, and came to refer to each of the four recorded accounts of his words and works.

#### Synoptic

Means “to see the same way” (Greek *syn* “with” and *optic* “to see”). Refers to Matthew, Mark, and Luke because of what they share in common in telling the story of Jesus.

#### Kingdom of God

The reign or rule of God. Jewish expectation hinged on a revived political expression of God’s reign in a new Messiah-warrior “David” who would restore the fortunes of Israel and inaugurate a worldwide reign of God. Jesus came announcing a kingdom that is “not of this world” — a message that violently grated against Jewish expectations.

#### Parable

Commonly defined as “an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.” The Greek word *parabolos* or parable simply meant an illustration or analogy. Jesus turned it into a real art form, constantly communicated deep and revolutionary truths in the garb of ordinary stories.

#### Disciple

More than a student enrolled in a class that he showed up for three times a week or so — a disciple was a *follower* of a rabbi or teacher. A disciple would set aside ordinary pursuits to be in the company of his rabbi or teacher, taking on his ways and words.

Luke, weighing in as the most lengthy account, has almost 50 percent original material, and 90 percent of John's Gospel isn't found in Matthew, Mark, or Luke. But all four together, and we have the testimony of Jesus in surround sound.

Here's a brief summary of the four Gospels:

### **MATTHEW — Israel's Messiah & King**

Written by Matthew (or Levi) the tax collector, this account of Jesus is aimed at a Jewish audience, intending to show to them Jesus as the fulfillment of all the Old Testament prophecies and pictures. Jesus is introduced as the "son of David, son of Abraham" with a Jewish genealogy to back it up. There is a heavy emphasis on the teachings of Jesus, centered around five key sermons he preached that Matthew records for us.

### **MARK — The Simple Truth**

Written by Mark — probably the one we know as "John Mark" in the book of Acts. It is believed that John Mark became a close associate of Peter in Rome, and that this Gospel reflects Peter's view. It's intended audience was evidently Roman culture, and so there is very little of the Old Testament here, and Jewish customs are explained. The focus is on the actions of Jesus — one of the key words being "immediately" (used over 40 times). All this makes for a very simple and fast-paced account.

### **LUKE — The Case for Christ**

Written by Luke, a close companion of Paul, this Gospel is the first of a two volume set on the words and works of Jesus (the companion volume is the book of Acts). Each volume is addressed to Theophilus, possibly a Roman official that Luke was trying to bring to deeper faith in Christ. Luke was gripped by the humanity (the second recorded genealogy of Jesus is found in Luke and goes all the way back to Adam) and the compassion of Jesus. Aiming at a Greco-Roman audience, look presents the ultimate "Son of Man" — tender in mercy, healing the sick, and embracing children and all the disenfranchised of society.

### **JOHN — The Word of God Made Flesh**

Written by John, "the disciple that Jesus loved," one of the inner circle of disciples that Jesus infested in heavily (Peter, James, and John). The Gospel of John is a Gospel of paradox. Written in simple language, it nevertheless contains the most complex theology about Jesus. In fact, the whole focus of John was on the identity of Jesus, according to Jesus. In this Gospel we find seven great "I Am" statements of Jesus: "I am the bread of life;" "I am the light of the world;" "I am the good shepherd;" "I am the door of the sheep;" "I am the resurrection and the life;" "I am the way, the truth and the life;" "I am the true vine." There is much more complex imagery, and extended commentary by John, as well as an expanded view of the ministry of Jesus. It's because of John's Gospel that we know Jesus had a ministry that lasted at least three years because John mentions at least that many annual Jewish Passovers during Jesus' ministry.

## **Personal Reading Notes**



Use this space to record the highlights — insights, observations, puzzling questions, "aha moments" — you experience during this week's reading: