The Gospels

The Gospels are the four books that begin the New Testament. Each Gospel tells about the life and work of Jesus. Each Gospel was written by a different author (each inspired by the Holy Spirit) with a different audience in mind. The differences in authorship and audience means we get rich and deep insight into Jesus as each Gospel was written to show who Jesus was and is to a different audience.

1. **Matthew**
   a. *Background:* Matthew wrote this Gospel with a Jewish audience in mind.
   b. *Purpose:* Matthew wrote "to demonstrate that Jesus is the Messiah predicted in the Old Testament."[1] "The Gospel of Matthew was written to introduce people from all nations to King Jesus, who has been granted all authority in heaven and on earth and who calls those called by God to pick up their crosses and follow him."[2]
   c. *Theme:* "Jesus is Immanuel, the Messiah, and the Savior of God's People."
   d. *Key Verses:* Matthew 16:13-20; Matthew 28:18-20
2. **Mark**
   a. *Background:* Mark wrote this Gospel to an audience of Gentiles in Rome.
   b. *Purpose:* "Mark's purpose in writing is likely threefold: (1) To preserve the gospel tradition in written form as the original apostles began to pass from the scene. (2) To confirm that, despite his crucifixion as a criminal, Jesus was indeed the mighty Messiah and Son of God. (3) To call Christ-followers to faithfulness and perseverance in the face of suffering and persecution."[3]
   c. *Theme:* "Jesus is the authoritative, miracle-working Son of God."
   d. *Key Verses:* Mark 10:45; Mark 15:39
3. **Luke**
   a. *Background:* Luke wrote this Gospel to a man named Theophilus.
   b. *Purpose:* Luke wrote to give a "defense of the Christian faith, useful for both evangelism and discipleship." "Luke's Gospel provides certainty about Jesus Christ, which brings certainty about life in the age to come and purpose in the here and now."[4]
   c. *Theme: "Jesus brings universal salvation in fulfillment of OT promises to Israel."*
   d. *Key Verses:* Luke 19:10; Luke 24:46-47
4. **John**
   a. *Background:* John wrote this Gospel to an audience in Ephesus, and ultimately to a universal audience.
   b. *Purpose:* John wrote "to demonstrate that Jesus is the Messiah so that people would believe in him and have eternal life (20:30-31)."
   c. *Theme:* "John's purpose for writing was to demonstrate that Jesus is the divine Messiah by setting forth a series of striking signs so that his readers might put their faith in him and have eternal life as a result (20:30–31)."[5]
   d. *Key Verse:* John 3:16; John 20:30-31

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[1] Unless otherwise noted, citations come from *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament*, by Andreas J. Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles.
[2] "Matthew," TGC Commentary, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/commentary/matthew/.
[3] "Mark," TGC Commentary, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/commentary/mark/.
[4] "Luke," TGC Commentary, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/commentary/luke/.
[5] "John," TGC Commentary, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/commentary/john/.

5. **Relationship Between the Gospels**
   a. "Anyone who has read the Gospels closely has noticed that they have similarities and differences. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are known as the 'Synoptic Gospels' since they offer very similar presentations of Jesus's life and teachings. John on the other hand usually records events and sayings of Jesus not found in these other Gospels."[6]
   b. Many of these differences can be attributed to the different audiences and purposes for each of the Gospels. In other words, as each author wrote to a different audience they included different details or placed the emphasis on different facets of a story in the same way that different bystanders might describe an event differently depending on whom they are talking to. While John does address some themes and events that the Synoptic Gospels do not, "When the Synoptics and John do overlap (e.g., John 6:1–15), John's Gospel agrees in all details with the Synoptics even though his vocabulary and expressions are his own. Careful comparison of the accounts in the four Gospels shows that they may differ, but they did not disagree. Their accounts are complementary, not contradictory."[7]
6. **Keys for Studying the Gospels**
   a. *Understand the Genre*—Genre refers to different kinds of literature written for different purposes that use different styles of writing to communicate different things. The Gospels are all written as narratives. These narratives were written to show who Jesus is and why people should believe in Him.
   b. *Principles of Interpretation*—"First, read the book all the way through with as few breaks as possible. Note important details in the narrative by asking the kinds of questions that an investigative reporter would ask such as who, what, when, where, why, and how. Second, interpret each narrative considering the purpose of the entire book. The purpose can be found in the introduction, conclusion, or thesis statement of the book. Since the Gospels were written to bear testimony about Jesus, proper interpretation will keep the focus on Jesus. Third, pay special attention to themes, titles, and phrases that are repeated in the book. Jesus and the NT writers did not waste words so if they repeat something, it is especially important. Fourth, seek to interpret events in light of OT teaching."[8]

Additional resources for Studying the Gospels can be found on the resources page of our church website under the "How to Study the Bible" section. You can scan the QR code below to access the resources.

[6] "Introduction to the Gospels and Acts," https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/introduction-to-the-gospels-and-acts/.
[7] "Introduction to the Gospels and Acts."
[8] "Introduction to the Gospels and Acts."