

The Four Gospels

Many readers of the New Testament wonder why it contains four different Gospels (accounts) of the one authentic gospel (the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ). Perhaps the main reason is that any one of these gospels alone would not do justice to Jesus' life and ministry. Each Gospel writer wrote about Jesus to a *different audience* for a *different purpose* to give a *unique perspective* on His life. Together, the four Gospels give us a *complete picture* of who Jesus was and what He accomplished during His ministry.

Different symbols for the Gospels are often used to communicate the distinctives of each account. A lion, symbolizing **Matthew**, represents *strength and royal authority*; a bull, representing **Mark**, portrays *service and power*; the figure of a man, for **Luke**, stands for *wisdom and character*; and an eagle, **John's** symbol, represents *deity*. The following capsule summaries of the Gospels should help you understand the distinctives of each.

MATTHEW

- Written to a Jewish audience to show that Jesus was the promised Messiah of Old Testament prophecy; key expression is "that it might be fulfilled"; quotes more from the Old Testament than any other Gospel.
- Uses alternating sections of didactic and narrative material to emphasize Jesus as Teacher.
- A major theme is the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God - God's rule in the world and human hearts.
- Other dominant themes are the church (16:18; 18:19), the second coming of Jesus (ch.25), and the ethical teachings of Jesus (chs. 5-7).

MARK

- Probably the first Gospel written; Matthew and Luke may have used Mark as a source.
- Focuses on Jesus as servant who ministers to the physical and spiritual needs of others.
- The shortest Gospel; written to a Gentile audience, particularly Roman citizens.
- Uses brevity in accounts, with rapid movement, to give a sense of urgency to the gospel message; key expression is "immediately."
- Mark's purpose was to show that Jesus was the Son of God; a Roman soldier's words at Jesus' death were, "Truly this Man was the Son of God!" (15:39)

LUKE

- Written by a Gentile writer, for Gentiles, to give the full story of Jesus' life, from His birth to the birth of the church.
- Records many of Jesus' parables not found in the other Gospels.
- Universal in outlook, portraying Jesus as the compassionate Savior of the world, with love for all people, whether rich or poor, Jew or Gentile; He reaches out especially to women and the poor and outcast of society.
- Emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit and the central place of prayer in Jesus' life and ministry.
- Key expression is "it happened" or "it came to pass."

JOHN

- Focuses on the theological meaning of Jesus' actions, rather than on the actions themselves; emphasizes who Jesus is, rather than what He did.
- Includes many lengthy discourses of Jesus around which narrative is woven.
- Uses many key words, such as "life," "light," "believe," "love," "witness," "glory," "water," and "truth," to portray Jesus as God's eternal Son.
- Presents Jesus as God incarnate through seven miraculous signs; key expression is "believe."
- John's clear purpose in writing is "that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing, you may have life in His name" (20:31).

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