

The Four Gospels: Background and Situation

Mark: The first Gospel to be written

Date: c.70 (the time of the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem)

Author/Audience:

Mark is written by a Jewish author to a mixed community that includes a large Gentile population

Situation:

The context is the persecution of Christians under Nero. Christians are suffering for their faith, and some are killed. People are wondering whether the new cause is worth the cost, and many are faltering in their faith.

Matthew: The second Gospel to be written; used Mark as a source

Date: c.80 (a decade after Mark and the destruction of the Temple)

Author/Audience:

Matthew is written by a Jewish author who is steeped in Jewish tradition, and he writes to a Jewish audience.

Situation:

The audience is dealing with rebuilding life after the loss of the Temple. Many thought that event would bring the end of the world, but now they know they have to find a way of life to continue on.

The audience is also dealing with the building conflict with Judaism, which will eventually lead to the “Parting of Ways” where Christianity becomes an entirely separate religion.

Luke: The third Gospel; used Mark as a source (possibly Matt)

Date: c.85 (likely after Matthew)

Author/Audience:

Luke may be written by a Gentile, and it is certainly written to a Gentile audience. Theophilus, the addressee, could be a patron, or could represent a congregation since it means “Loved by God.”

Situation:

The context is the largely Gentile population in this new Christian religion that is splitting with Judaism. Luke takes pains to show that God was faithful to Israel and that bringing in the Gentiles was always a part of the plan. Luke’s audience seems to be wealthy, and he addresses issues of money more than any other Gospel writer.

John: The fourth Gospel; may or may not have known Synoptics

Date: c.90 (last of the Gospels)

Author/Audience:

John is compiled by a group of authors and circulated to a mixed congregation who is predominately Jewish or made up of Hellenistic Jews. Attributed to “the beloved disciple,” maybe John of Zebedee

Situation:

The context is the “Parting of the Ways” that has continued to build. John’s community is experiencing isolation since they once belonged to the Jewish synagogue, and they are feeling the growing pains of building their own group identity around their unique Christology.

OUTLINE of the FOURTH GOSPEL

INTRODUCTION [Ch 1]

The Prologue: Word Became Flesh (1:1-18)

The Beginning of Jesus' Ministry (1:19-51)

THE BOOK OF SIGNS [Chs 2-12]

Jesus' Public Ministry: Signs and Discourses (chs. 2-12)

***Changing Water into Wine (2:1-11)**

Cleansing the Temple (2:12-25)

Jesus Teaches Nicodemus (3:1-21)

John the Baptist's Final Testimony about Jesus (3:22-36)

Jesus and the Samaritan Woman (4:1-42)

***Healing of the Official's Son (4:43-54)**

Visit to Jerusalem and ***Healing the Man Paralyzed by the Pool (ch. 5)**

***Feeding the 5,000 and Jesus' / Bread of Life Discourse / *Jesus Walks on Water (ch. 6)**

Jesus as Living Water / I am the Light of the World (chs. 7-8)

***Healing of the Man Born Blind (ch. 9)**

Jesus is the Good Shepherd (ch. 10)

***The Raising of Lazarus (ch. 11)**

Jesus Prepares for His Passion (ch.12)

The Anointing of Jesus' Feet (12:1-11)

Jesus' Entry into Jerusalem as King (12:12-19)

Jesus Predicts His Death (12:20-36)

Belief and Unbelief among the Jews (12:37-50)

THE BOOK OF GLORY [Chs 13-20]

Jesus' Farewell Discourses and Prayer (chs. 13-17)

At the Last Supper (chs. 13-14)

Jesus washes the disciples' feet (13:1-17)

Jesus predicts his betrayal (13:18-30)

Jesus predicts Peter's denial (13:31-38)

Jesus comforts his disciples (14:1-4)

Jesus is the way to the Father (14:5-14)

Jesus promises the Holy Spirit (14:15-30)

On the way to Gethsemane (chs. 15-16)

I am the vine; you are the branches (15:1-17)

Jesus' prayer (ch. 17)

The Passion (chs. 18-20)

Jesus' Betrayal and Arrest (18:1-11)

Jesus' Trials before Jewish and Roman Officials (18:12-40)

Jesus' Crucifixion (19:1-27)

Jesus' Death, Burial, and Resurrection (19:28-20:29)

Statement of the Gospel's Purpose (20:30-31)

EPILOGUE [Ch21]

Jesus' Recommissioning of the Disciples (ch. 21)

The Four Gospels: Christology and Essential Themes

Mark: The Gospel of the Suffering Son of God Who Gives Himself as a Ransom (Mark 1:15; 8:34-38)

Jesus: Mark emphasizes Jesus' humanity and his suffering.

Followers of Jesus: The disciples continually misunderstand who Jesus is and his mission, yet they are still included in the mission despite their failings.

Characteristics:

- First Gospel written
- Likes repetition, sandwiches, and other literary devices
- Fast-paced, succinct
- "Messianic Secret" presents a developing picture of the significance of Jesus as the narrative moves forward.

Essential Theme:

- Jesus comes to suffer (and the disciples just don't get this). While the religious leaders and even the disciples misunderstand Jesus' mission and call, the most unsuspecting characters prove to be the best "disciples"—women, those who are sick, and Gentiles.

Matthew: The Gospel of the Ultimate Rabbi Who Fulfills Israel's Hopes and Brings the Kingdom (Matt. 5:17-20)

Jesus: Matthew presents Jesus as a Jewish teacher. His mission and message is linked to Israel's Scriptures and fulfills their expectations.

Followers of Jesus: The negative portrayal of the disciples is cleaned up a bit, although they still fail in big ways.

Characteristics:

- Emphasis on teaching (comes in major blocks)
- Focus on prophecy-fulfillment
- Follows Mark's general outline, weaving discourses into the narrative blocks (5 major teaching sections)
- Sermon on the Mount

Essential Theme:

- Jesus is the fulfillment of Israel's expectations, who brings the Kingdom of God and teaches the way of discipleship, bringing the Law to its true *telos*.

Luke: The Gospel of the Savior for All People Who Brings Good News to the Poor and Opens the Kingdom of God to the Gentiles (Luke 4:16-21)

Jesus: Jesus is the Savior of the world who breaks social boundaries and fulfills Israel's role as the light to the nations.

Followers of Jesus: Luke puts the disciples in a more positive light. They are co-journeymen with him in his ministry. In the sequel, Acts, they become the founders of the Christian movement through whom Jesus continues to speak and Act.

Characteristics:

- Emphasis on social outcasts (the poor, women, Gentiles)
- Emphasis on journeys, movement toward Jerusalem
- Stresses the activity and power of the Holy Spirit
- Written to give a more suitable account of Jesus' life

Essential Theme:

- Jesus brings good news for all people, that God's salvation, though rooted in Israel, goes beyond the Jews. Salvation is universal and especially for the downtrodden.

John: The Gospel of the Word Who Reveals the Father and Brings Abundant Life (John 1:14, 18)

Jesus: Jesus is one with God, preexistent, divine. Jesus spends much time talking about his role, and his signs prove his exalted identity.

Followers of Jesus: John introduces the "beloved disciple" who is in many ways the ideal follower. Jesus' followers get special attention in John as he washes their feet and prays for them in his final hours.

Characteristics:

- Emphasis on "signs" (miracles showing who Jesus was)
- Elevated Christology – the divinity of Jesus is stressed

Essential Theme:

Jesus is God and came to reveal God through the incarnation. As God's Son, Jesus works to join all humanity with God, bringing abundant life to them as God's children.