

McCLAIN MINISTRIES

The Living Gospels



Matthew Mark Luke John



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Overview of the Gospels

It's very significant that some facts are recorded in all four Gospels while others are not. Gregory Narianzen, a noted biblical scholar, succinctly summarizes the Gospel thusly: "Matthew wrote the wonderful works of Christ for the Jew; Mark, for the Roman; Luke, for the Greek; and John, a herald reaches the very heavens, for all." The Gospel for the Jew must be the Gospel of the fulfillment of prophecy. It must deal with a people with knowledge of the Old Testament, who were familiar with prophecies relative to the Messiah. At the very beginning Matthew meets these needs by presenting the credentials of Jesus relative to the covenant by tracing his lineage to Abraham. The Jew would require such a procedure and in this manner only could the Messianic claims of our Lord be established. The Roman would not be concerned with the fulfillment of prophecy. Jesus must appear to the Roman as a man of power, the worker, the conqueror. And this is what the Gospel of Mark achieved. To satisfy the Greek, Jesus must appear to be the worldwide man. The Greek could only appreciate a universal Christ in all of humanity. The Gospel of Luke accomplished this goal. The Gospel of John addresses the deep spiritual needs of mankind regardless of nationality. In John's opening statement he establishes Jesus Christ as the Divine Son of God. The four gospels are basically different from any ordinary biography. They are traits of our Lord. The four Evangelists do not try to describe Him, and they express few personal opinions about Him. They present Him in such a way that He speaks and acts for Himself. It is Christ Himself in His Divine character and deeds, whom we meet in the Gospels.

Matthew

Matthew, author of the first Gospel, was also known as Levi, the son of Alphaeus. When Jesus called him to be one of the Twelve, he was a tax-collector (a "publican"), a post hated by the Jews because the holder was appointed by the Romans. The name Matthew may have been adopted by Levi because of his new relationship with Jesus.

Matthew's Gospel has been assigned various dates of origin, ranging from A.D. 60-70.

As far as the design of this Gospel is concerned, there is no question. It is suggested in the opening statement of the book: "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." The lineal descent of our Lord is traced back in this Gospel for the Jew. Matthew depicts Christ not only as the greatest Prophet and Lawgiver, but also as fulfilling the Law and the Prophets. He is shown to be Messiah of Old Testament predictions, the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant, King of the true Israel in the Davidic line.

The Gospel for the Jew

The design of Matthew's Gospel in setting forth the Messianic claims of Jesus in a manner to satisfy the Jew has been briefly noted in the introductory statement. If Mark and Luke had written their Gospels after the manner of the Gospel of Matthew they would not have met the needs of those for whom their Gospels were directed. Base on the audience they were trying to reach it is obvious that there are different characteristics of the four Gospels.

In the preparation of Matthew's Gospel, all characteristics of the Jewish life must be considered. The one fact that had been impressed upon the Jewish mind from the beginning of their history was that they were divinely chosen and set apart as a peculiar people through whom the redemptive purposes of Jehovah would be achieved. They made a special point of the fact that "We be Abraham's seed and heirs to the promise of God."

To present Jesus to the Jew required an understanding of their religious system. This system was typical and symbolic. It moves with types and shallows.

Matthew constantly keeps before his readers the Old Testament Scriptures and by quotations refers to them nearly one hundred times and to the prophets about fifty times. It abounds in statements to show that Jesus fulfilled the prophetic Scriptures. The Jew would require such a procedure and in this manner only could the Messianic claims of our Lord be established.

Thus in His person, His words and works is furnished the proof that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah. It is the Gospel of the Kingdom. In the training of the Twelve, by His earlier statements, Jesus presented the law of the Kingdom, and by parables the progress of the Kingdom, and by many details authenticated that He is indeed the Messiah.

The Trial of Jesus according to Matthew's Gospel

Jesus was tried by both the ecclesiastical and civil courts. The former consisting of the Sanhedrin and Caiaphas, the high priest. The latter consisting of Pontius Pilate the Roman governor. These trials occurred on the morning of the crucifixion and were rushed through with such speed, that within a span of seven hours following the arrest, Jesus was put to death. The process clearly shows that the whole proceeding was irregular and false to the core.

Following the arrest at the garden of Gethsemane by Jewish authorities Jesus was brought to the palace of Annas the deposed high priest and father-in-law of Caiaphas. Here some of the rulers and Caiaphas attempted by questions to get Jesus to commit Himself.

The Sanhedrin then assembled at the house of Caiaphas. All regulations relative to the rights of the defendant were ignored. Jesus had no witnesses and no advocate. His accusers were His judges, who, regardless of the truth, had already decided that Jesus should die.

Since, according to their law, a sentence of death could not be passed at night, as soon as it was dawn another meeting was called and Jesus was condemned to death on the charge of blasphemy. The Jewish court was permitted to try criminals, but sentence of death must be submitted to the civil court for acceptance or rejection. Thus Jesus was sent by Caiaphas to Pilate who certainly did not ratify the verdict of the Sanhedrin, but, on the contrary, declared emphatically the innocence of Jesus, and endeavored to save Him from His murderers. He would never have consented to the death of Jesus but for the threats of the Jews which endangered his official position.

Mark

John Mark was the son of Mary, a Christian Jewess in whose home the early Christians seem to have been sheltered (Acts 12:12). Roman in training and development, he was the nephew or cousin of Barnabas. He accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their missionary journey but, for reasons not recorded in the Bible, he left them at Perga. A departure that resulted in a disagreement between Paul and Barnabas over Mark's going with them on their second journey. The result was that Silas, not Barnabas, was Paul's companion. The relations between Paul and Mark were later resumed.

Mark's Gospel was written between A.D. 63 and 66, because it is certain - the date was prior to the destruction of Jerusalem.

The fact that Latin and Aramaic words are translated into Greek indicates the Gospel was designed for Gentile readers. It is generally agreed that Mark was the liaison for the Romans. The vivid presentation of details and the vigorous action in it suggest that the information set forth in this Gospel came from an eye-witness. Information persisted from the time of Papias that Peter was the narrator. Clement of Alexandria, suggest Mark's Gospel was submitted to Peter for his approval.

The Gospel of Mark bears all the earmarks of originality, so it could not have been an abridged Matthew's Gospel. It is evident in its vivacious style, in the frequency with which the present tense is used, and in its use of the word "straightway" (which occurs numerous times). Many details appearing in the Gospel of Mark are not found in the other Gospels. It is often referenced as the Gospel of Power and Law.

The Gospel for the Roman

The world of that day was Roman, under the rule of Rome. The Gospel that would present the claims of Jesus to the Roman must do so with reference to the characteristics of that race.

The Roman represented the idea of power embodied in the State which was carried to the point of world-wide dominion. Jesus would need to have the characteristics of a man of action, of law, of state worship, of Universal Empire. "He had the consciousness of being born to rule the world." In Daniel's vision this is seen as the legs of iron. It was the iron which systematically crushed nations.

The Roman would care very little of the fulfillment of prophecy. Again he did not have the philosophical appreciation of the Greek. To this man the Christ had to be presented from the Roman point of view, answering to the idea of divine power, action, law and universal dominion. Jesus had to appear to him as the man of power, the conqueror. And this is what Mark's Gospel achieved. It is the Gospel of power, of action, of conquest over nature, disease and death. In the midst of these expressions of power the people exclaimed, "What manner of man is this?"

From birth to baptism

Mark's Gospel is silent on all points of the genealogy, birth, infancy and life in Nazareth of Jesus. The Roman would have no interest in such matters as fulfilling Old Testament prophecies of the manner of birth and birthplace. The same is true of the facts relative to the birth of John the Baptist.

The Sermon on the Mount, the charge to the Twelve, all of John's Gospel's discourses are omitted. Aside from the fact that the Roman appreciated deeds rather than discourse, these discourses would have been particularly uninteresting since they deal so largely with Jewish ideas.

Parables of special Jewish significance were omitted. Only two of the seven parables delivered on the sea shore are used by Mark; that of the sower, applicable to all classes, and that of the mustard-seed which sets forth the world-wide extension of the kingdom which would interest the Roman. The parables used to rebuke the Jews are not used.

The Romans did not use highly figurative forms of speech and they would not have been greatly impressed by those forms of discourse. Overall Mark uses but four parables and that of the seed-corn is peculiar to his Gospel. The kingdom to Mark is the kingdom of power and not that of prophecy. Only the miracles of power would hold the attention of the Roman while the spirituality and Messianic character of the truth of those would not be important.

The style of this Gospel is unlike that of the others. It gets to the point quickly. The chronological sequence of events is very detailed. From first to last the movement is orderly and free from confusion.

SIGNIFICANCE OF ADDITIONS OF MARK'S GOSPEL

The things added by Mark have a peculiar interest as well as the things omitted. The first of these additions is the parable of the seed-corn (4:26-34). The parable of the seed-corn sets "the development independent of the human will, but inevitable—"For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself."

The next addition is that of the healing of the deaf and dumb man of Decapolis (7:31) the third, the healing of the blind man at Bethsaida (8:22-26). These two miracles are two of the greatest physical healings in Jesus ministry. In the case of the blind man the cure was of a progressive nature. From the imperfect sight of seeing men as trees, he came to see normally. These miracles are striking symbols of the operations of grace upon our sinful nature, but for the Roman, the man of action, they present for his easy of appreciation the saving power of Christ.

The last addition is in connection with the Great Commission (16:15-2). It carries the assurance of divine co-operation through the ascended Son of God with His Father on the throne, and also declares the work of the disciples in going forth to conquer the world. It is the point of view for the Roman, the man of action and of world-wide empire.

Luke

Luke, was a native of Antioch in Syria. He becomes the only Gentile writer of books in the Bible. He was a man of excellent education, a Greek immersed in Grecian culture. Too, he was a physician—a profession which in his day was almost wholly in the hands of the Greeks. Luke was not an eye-witness of the events in his Gospel. He could not be considered, as one of the Seventy sent out by Christ or one of the two disciples who walked on the road to Emmaus, as thought by some because he is the only Gospel writer to record these events (10:1-24) and to give the details of the second (24:13-35; 16:12-13).

Doctor Luke, the beloved physician, was Paul's companion on the second missionary journey, from Troas to Philippi (Acts 16:10-17), where he probably remained for some time. He again became the Apostle's companion, however, and remained with him to the close of the narrative in Acts (about A.D. 58 to 63). In II Timothy 4:11 Paul mentions that Luke is with him; and this was during the Apostle's second imprisonment in Rome. Little is known of Luke's later life.

Although Luke gives special prominence to the healing ministry of Christ, he does not neglect our Lord's redemptive work. His Gospel is not as well arranged chronologically as are those of Matthew and Mark. He groups his details "in order," but does not always carry the "order" thorough before starting on another series. There are many details of our Lord's ministry which Luke alone records, these will later be dealt with more specifically.

The time of the Gospel is placed immediately before The Acts, of which he was the author, and addressed to the same individual, Theophilus. It is assigned to A.D. 63 with Rome as the place of writing.

Things Omitted and Added

The Thirty Years

1. While Matthew deals with six things pertaining to the birth, infancy, childhood and later life of Jesus, Luke deals with twelve.
2. Luke does not record the early Judean ministry.
3. Parables. Only three of the seven parables of the kingdom (Ma. 13). The parables of the laborers (Ma. 20), the two sons (Ma. 21), the marriage of the king's son (Ma. 22), and those of (Ma 25), which were especially applicable to the Jews, Luke omits.
- 4 The first section of the third period of the Galilean Ministry is omitted as also is the autumn visit to Jerusalem prior to the Perea Ministry.
5. The Perea Ministry. This section sets forth the work of Christ for the Gentile world. The record contained 9:51, 18:14; 19:1-28, belongs exclusively to Luke's Gospel. Other additions by Luke 6:17-49; 7:11-17.

John

In stating that he is the writer of this Gospel (John 21:24-25), the Apostle John does not mention himself by name. He and his brother James were sons of Zebedee and Salome who, many believe, was the sister of our Lord's mother (John 19:25). John was born in Bethesda of Galilee and was by occupation a fisherman. His close relationship with Jesus is noted by such expressions as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" and "the beloved disciple." It has been said that he was able to give men "the heart of Christ" in his messages.

This Gospel was prepared nearly a generation after the other Gospels had been written. It shows that the life and labors of Jesus were already well-known to Christians. Meanwhile the Apostles had preached the Gospel in many lands. Peter and Paul, among others had suffered martyrdom. All the Apostles, save John alone, had passed to their reward. Jerusalem had been destroyed by the Romans.

The style of this Gospel is simple, but its thought is profound. Its great objective is to set forth the divinity of our Lord as the basis of faith and to meet the spiritual needs, not for a particular class or group—Jew, Roman, or Greek—but of all men. Hence it is called the "Spiritual Gospel" and "The Gospel for the Church." This Gospel states its own purpose: "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, not written in this book: but these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Son of God; and that, believing, ye might have life through his name." (John 20:30-31).

This explains why John does not record the facts concerning the birth and early life of Christ but instead of providing a genealogy, sets forth His relationship with His Father in the perspective of eternity: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God, and the Word was with God." (1:1).

It further explains why certain great miracles, not recorded by the other three Gospel writers, are given; and why, instead of giving Jesus in parables, this Gospel contains the great spiritual discourses of our Lord that do not appear in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke).

OUTSTANDING FACTS

In support of the divinity of Christ John records seven great miracles: water turned into wine, healing the nobleman's son at a distance, feeding the five thousand, walking on the water, healing the man born blind, raising Lazarus to life, the draught of fish after the resurrection. Matthew and Mark make use of the walking on the water, and all four records the feeding of the five thousand. The other five are recorded by John alone. Healing the nobleman's son at a distance, and raising Lazarus to life after he had been dead four days, were most unusual and gave His divinity an outstanding character.

As his opening words announce the divinity of the Word so the closing words of the Gospel state that the design was to establish this great truth as the basis of faith. In other words, that faith is groundless if Jesus Christ is not the Divine Son of God.

The Spiritual Gospel

This Gospel meets the spiritual needs of the soul, whether Jew or Gentile. To this end John gives the great discourses on the new birth.

Thus the divinity of Jesus shows in His words as well as in His works. It is in these great discourses that the deeper spiritual relation of Christ to His Church appears. These profound spiritual truths are not expressed in parabolic form.

He uses figures of speech and illustrations, not parables, in the proper sense of the word.

Things Omitted and Added

I have noted throughout the Outline and in some of these notes the things that John omits and the things he records that are peculiar to his Gospel. The consistency with which he selects his material is remarkable, and, in fact, the same is true of all the Gospels.