

INTRODUCTION TO THE GOSPELS

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DEFINITION:

Gospel: Greek *euangelion* = good news; Gospel refers to the books; gospel refers to the message

Eng.: Gospel According to Matthew/Matthew

Gr.: *Kata Mathaion* (according to Matthew)

WHAT ARE THE GOSPELS?

1. Religious mythology (not real or factual)
2. Aetiology (story to explain origin of something; based on fact)
3. Historical biography (factual)
4. Gospel (unique genre of literature)

WHY FOUR GOSPELS?

Originally about 30 Gospels in circulation – 4 were chosen by Church Councils

1. Portrait photography
 - Frontal view
 - Profile view
 - Silhouette view
2. Biblical analogy
 - Inclusive nature of the number 4
 - 4 corners of the earth
 - 4 living creatures – 4 faces
 - Sanctuary – 4-fold pattern
 - Israel – 4-tier community
 - Eden – 4 rivers
 - New Jerusalem – 4 walls
 - Revelation – 4 sets of “sevens”

TEXTUAL TRANSMISSION

- *Oral stage*: about AD 31-65 – stories – sermons
- *Autographs*: original writings – AD 65-90 – lost
- *Manuscripts (MSS)*: from AD 65 onwards – copies – Antioch, Alexandria, Rome, Constantinople, etc. – about 1500 MSS
- *Standard & Critical Texts*: Textus Receptus (TR) – Erasmus – Nestle-Aland – UBS
- *Translation*: Jerome – Martin Luther – John Wycliffe, William Tyndale, etc.

WHO WERE THE AUTHORS?

Matthew

- Levi Matthew
- Galilean
- Tax collector
- Background disciple
- Meticulous with details
- Familiarity with Hebrew Bible

- Martyred in Ethiopia

Mark

- John Mark
- Mother was Mary of Jerusalem, a sponsor of Jesus
- Associate of Barnabas, Paul, and Peter
- First generation church kid

Luke

- Greek from Turkey
- Medical doctor
- Missionary companion of Paul
- Not a first hand witness of Jesus' life
- Educated and cultured

John

- Parents: Zebedee & Salome
- Well-to-do fisherman
- Disciple of John the Baptist
- First follower of Jesus (with Andrew)
- Cousin of Jesus
- Inner circle disciple
- Present at Calvary
- Companion of Peter
- Missionary base at Ephesus
- Contributed 5 books to NT
- Died a natural death

THE AUDIENCES

- Matthew – the Jews
- Mark – the Romans
- Luke – the Greeks
- John – Christians and critics of the Church

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Palestine:

- Galilee – Herods – Jewish population
- Samaria – Samaritan population
- Judea – Roman proconsul – Jewish population

Roman Rule:

- Highways, aqueducts, theatres
- Taxes, Roman legions

Sanhedrin: Jewish ruling Council – Sadducees and Pharisees

Jewish Revolts:

- Galilee – Zealots – Sicarii

- Coercion, kidnappings, assassinations
- Ruthless suppression of revolts by the Romans – Jewish wars
- Messianic expectation

CULTURAL ISSUES

Social Groups:

- Gentiles – ambivalent attitude of Jews towards
- Romans – hated authority
- Samaritans – despised by Jews
- Galileans – country folk – unsophisticated
- Judeans – cultured – sophisticated

Jewish Social Classes:

- Priests and aristocracy – political players -- privileged
- Pharisees – religionists – privileged
- Levites – temple workers – privileged
- Men – literate – religious & legal privileges
- Women – largely illiterate – very limited religious & legal privileges

RELIGIOUS CONCERNS

Religious Parties:

1. Essenes: small – all men – isolationists – theologically conservative – commune-style living – Qumran – library – Bible interpreters – pacifist group – “prince of light” theology – John the Baptist – no recorded encounter with Jesus
2. Sadducees: priestly party – theologically liberal – highly politicised – policy of appeasing Romans – wealthy controlled the temple – controlled chairmanship of Sanhedrin – main opposition to Jesus during Passion Week events – many became Christians
3. Pharisees: “separated ones” – the brotherhood – theologically conservative – some rich members – most lived simple lives – legalistic approach to Torah – education-oriented – respected by the people – condescending attitude towards people – power base at synagogues – lived in communities – Jesus’ main protagonists before the Passion Week – many became Christians

Religious Activities:

- Synagogue – Sabbath – school
- Temple – sacrifices – festivals

THE SYNOPTIC PROBLEM

Synoptic:

- Refers to Matthew, Mark, Luke
- Greek *sunopsis* “seeing together”
- Similarity of viewpoint and content
- Similarities: geographic sequence – same events – characteristics

Questions:

- How did authors get materials?
- Why the similarities?
- What about the differences?

Theories:

- Common dependence on one Gospel
- Common dependence on oral source
- Interdependence
 1. Augustine’s proposal – Matthew first – Mark from Matthew – Luke from Matthew & Mark – standard view till 19th cent
 2. “Two Gospel” hypothesis – Matthew first – Luke second – Mark from Matthew & Luke – quite popular today
 3. “Two Source” hypothesis – Mark first – also “Q” which is lost – Matthew & Luke from both Mark & Q – sometimes called “Four Source”

JOHANNINE CORPUS

Corpus = body of writings

John:

- Wrote 5 books – 3 epistles, Gospel, Apocalypse
- Dominant theology is love
- All works from same period – last part of 1st century
- All works written (most likely) in Ephesus

John’s Gospel:

- Written some 30 years after Synoptics
- Simple Greek with church readership in mind
- Different from Synoptics in structure and content
- No nativity stories – no parables – few miracles
- Tells unique stories – records long sermons and prayers
- Distinctive theological perspective
- Concerned with the heart of God and the theological significance of Christ
- Passion Week episode the only resemblance to Synoptics
- Impact of John’s experience and visions at Patmos
- Most intimate view of Christ as man and God

THE SYNOPTICS AND JOHN

The Synoptics	John
Chiefly concerned with Jesus’ ministry in the north, around Galilee	Gives more coverage to Jesus’ ministry in the south, around Judea
Much emphasis on “kingdom” inheritance	More emphasis on the person of Jesus and eternal inheritance
Jesus as Son of David, Son of man	Jesus especially as Son of God
The gospel of the infant church	The gospel of the maturing church
The earthly story	The heavenly meaning
Jesus’ sayings generally short	More of long discourses of Jesus
Comparatively little commentary by the gospel writer	Much commentary by John
Only one mention of a Passover	Three, possibly four, Passovers cited

THE GOSPELS

Matthew

Jewishness of Matthew

- Links gospel with the OT In 1:1 there is a conscious reference to Genesis.
- 11:14 -- Elijah -- Mal 4: 4-5.
- Links Jesus to David and Abraham (1:1)
- There are 62 references to and 44 quotations from the OT

Matthew's Topical Approach

- Topical rather than a chronological arrangement.
- Five discourses of Jesus—Sermon on the Mount (5-7), instructions to the Twelve (10), kingdom parables (13), kingdom lifestyle (18-20), and the Mt of Olives discourse (23-25).

Matthew's Concept of King

- Royalty terms (68 times) – “king” 14 times; “kingdom” 17 times; “kingdom of heaven” 32 times; and “kingdom of God” 5 times.
- Jesus son of David 8 times.
- The Magis' question in 2:2
- Satan's offer in 4:1-11
- “I say to you” 50 times.
- Often people worship Jesus

Mark

Mark's Romanness

- The name Mark is Roman
- Rarely quotes from the OT
- Explains Aramaic words
- Pictures Jesus as a man of action and concentrates on miracles.
- Employs repetitions in a way similar to Latin
- Peter is a major figure

Mark's Busyness

- Jesus was perennially at work.
- Many busy days are recorded
- 12 of the 16 chapters begin with “and”
- Use of the historic present.
- Use of “immediately” (40 times)

Mark's Concept of Servant

- A servant's life is unheralded
- Mark's own occupation as attendant
- Jesus is unostentatious
- 20 miracles recorded but only 4 parables.
- “Gospel” is used 8 times
- Jesus' hands

Luke

Luke's Gentile Ambience

- The author is Greek
- The Gospel is directed to a Greek, Theophilus
- Jesus is presented as the Greek ideal man
- Favourable references to Gentiles (2:32; 4:25-27; 21:24) – site of the crucifixion is designated by its Gentile name, Calvary

Christ's Humanity

- The Phrase "son of man" is used 24 times
- The most complete coverage of Jesus' birth
- Mentions Jesus' age: 12 and 30.
- Jesus is linked to human history
- Temptations parallel those of Adam and Eve.
- Common human practices are mentioned: prayer and praise (5 songs)

Luke's Concept of Compassion

- 4:18 as declaration of mission
- Samaritans are portrayed in a favourable way
- Women hold a high place
- It is the "Gospel of the home"
- Luke tells stories about the only child (7:12-13; 8:42; 9:38)
- The poor, the disabled, and sinners figure prominently

John

Jesus as God

- Focus on Jesus as God (see 1:1-3) -- choice of material
- First statement of the book (1:1-3) – the phrase "Son of God" (1:34)
- First miracle (2:1-11), the attribute of pre-existence (8:58), and his own claim (5:22, 28, 29)
- Significant omissions in John – no genealogy -- no temptations
- At the Passion – no cry of "if it is possible" – no sweat of blood – no crying women – no Simon to carry the cross – no cry of God-forsakenness – and no mocking of the crowd.
- Includes facts not found elsewhere – facts that assert deity – soldiers falling back (18:6) – Jesus' seamless robe (19:23) – and even in death he is in command (19:30).

John's simplicity

- Simple words to express profound thoughts – "believe" (98 times), "world" (78 times), "know" (55 times), "life" (50 times), "witness" (46 times), "glory" (40 times), and "love" (40 times).
- Conflicting opposites – light versus darkness; love versus hate; life versus death; flesh versus spirit; slavery versus liberty.
- Depth of meaning through ordinary words, e.g., "word" (40 times) = computation, account, measure, sum, consideration, value, reputation, argument, principle, law, thesis, narrative, phrase, message, dialogue, proverb, language, wisdom, etc. The Gk *logos* requires about 40 different words in English.

John's use of sevens

- Number 7 in both the Gospel and Revelation.

- 7 times: we read “these things I have spoken to you;” Jesus addressed the woman at the well; Jesus spoke of himself as bread of life; and mentioned his ‘hour’.
- 7 miracles: water to wine (2); healing nobleman’s son (4); healing cripple at Bethesda (5); feeding 500 (6); walking on water (6); healing a man born blind (9); and raising Lazarus (11). These miracles begin with wedding and end with the grave.
- 7 witnesses: John the Baptist (1); Nathaniel (1); the Samaritan woman (4); Peter (6); Martha (11); Thomas (20); and John himself (21).
- 7 “I AMS”: bread of life (5:35); light of the world (8:12); door (10:9); good shepherd (10:11); resurrection and life (11:25); way, truth, and life (14:6); and true vine (15:5).

John’s use of “believe”

- The word “believe” occurs 98 times
- Mixed reception and divided opinions (7:43; 9:16; 10:19).
- Even after his greatest miracle the reception is still mixed (11:45, 53).
- The unbelief of Israel (1:5, 11).
- Importance of believing: it is the right to becoming an heir (1:12); it provides access to immortality (3:16).
- Belief is commitment to a person, Jesus, “believe in Jesus.”