

Jesus in the Gospels

WEEK ONE

Studying the Bible & Introduction to the Gospels

We are called to be servants and students of the Word. We live by every Word that proceeds out of God's mouth (Matthew 4:4), so we come to the Word with a clear mind, a humble, teachable spirit, and a hunger to know Him. We ask Him to come in by the Spirit of Truth and sit down and break open the bread of His own life with us (Revelation 3:20). It's something we do WITH Him, in His presence, and with great expectation and hunger.

Also, we're coming to the Word to read/study so we can be touched by the grace of God to believe that what is written will come to pass literally. This includes who Jesus is as the Messiah, His plans for the nation of Israel and followers of Jesus around the world, and the full redemption of all of creation. It's the revelation of the truth of these prophecies and promises that causes us to have a vibrant spirit and to endure in difficult times. If, when life is normal, we cannot believe and obey the simple ways of God like righteousness, wisdom, humility, repentance, then how when things are difficult will we believe what He says about these end times? We are entering a time in history when great moves of both travail and harvest are coming upon the earth, and we are called to partner with Him in faith and authority without growing weary or afraid or anxious or dull in spirit/compromising. It is His Word that leads, empowers, and sustains us through all of these things so that we overcome, victorious in faith to the end.

STUDYING THE BIBLE

I. Why should I study the Bible?

- A. Studying the Bible is one of the most important ways your faith in Jesus Christ is matured and solidified. Here's how Paul talks about studying Scripture and following sound teaching when he writes to his spiritual son, Timothy, the pastor of the church in Ephesus.

2 Timothy 3:10-17 Now you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, persecutions, and sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium and at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord rescued me! Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived (no ability to endure hardships). You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them (endurance through trials gives the stamp of proven character), and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

- B. As you read the Bible, the Holy Spirit reveals God's nature, His ways, and His will. Through the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit will encourage you (Romans 15:4), expose your heart motives (John 3:19-21; Hebrews 4:12-13), renew your thinking (Romans 12:2) and instruct you how to live (2 Timothy 3:16). God's Word will light your path (Psalm 119:105) and act as the plumb line of truth for every part of your life (John 17:17).
- C. This is why it's so important to spend time every day reading the Bible, studying it, meditating on it (Psalm 1:1-3), and memorizing it (Psalm 119:11).

II. We approach the Word of God naturally and supernaturally.

- A. **Naturally** in that we prioritize the Word, set aside quality/quantity time in our day, and give the effort to read it, study it, memorize it, meditate on it thorough the day, and talk with Holy Spirit about it.

Acts 17:10-11 The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.

2 Timothy 2:15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.

- B. **Supernaturally** in that we rely on the anointing of the Holy Spirit to understand and perceive God's nature and ways by revelation as we read, and we receive His conviction that teaches us how to live, where to repent, and what to do based on what we're reading.

1 John 2:27 As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him.

John 14:25-26 *These things I have spoken to you while abiding with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.* (He accesses what we've already heard or read naturally.)

III. Basic Study Tips (simplified principles of exegesis and hermeneutics)

- A. **Historical Awareness.** First, I approach each book as a student of history. I want to know as much as I can about the author, about the audience at the time, the culture and their geographical setting so I can get at what the Holy Spirit was saying to the original audience.

NOTE: As a general rule, the Bible cannot mean for me today what God never intended it to mean for the original audience. The exception is principalizing, or drawing practical applications from godly principles that reflect God's eternal nature and character. For example, in 1 Corinthians Paul takes the command from Deuteronomy about not muzzling an ox while he treads out the grain and applies it to how Christian leaders should be compensated for their work. The original Old Testament writer was not intending to address whether or not Bible teachers are paid, but Paul saw an eternal principle in the Old Testament law that revealed God's nature and correctly applied that principle to a completely different situation.

- B. **Textual Awareness.** Next, I try to be mindful of the original text, using a tool like Blue Letter Bible to dig into the meaning behind key Greek and Hebrew words that are used. BLB also includes useful tools like an interlinear (Greek/English side-by-side), Strong's Concordance, Thayer's Lexicon, and dive into the concordance and dictionaries. (These are limited in what they can tell you because of context and how to read original languages, e.g. "butterfly")
- C. **Key Words.** I pay attention to and mark repeated words (repeated words are key words that point to major themes and overarching ideas that put verses in a broader context).
- D. **Context is King.** I try to read whole books at a time, even if I'm only focusing on a single chapter. If I don't have time to read the entire book, I'll at least read the chapters around the one I'm studying so I get a sense of the larger context. Otherwise, it's too easy to proof-text, or pull a verse out of its context to mean whatever I want it to mean.
- E. **Let Scripture Interpret Scripture.** When I get stuck on a passage, unsure about its meaning, I try to look at other places in Scripture that deal with the same issue so that

scripture can interpret scripture. This means paying attention to cross-references by looking in the center column of my Bible, doing word searches for key words, or digging into the TSK (Treasury of Scripture Knowledge in BLB).

- F. Read the Bible first and primarily from a **God-centered perspective**, not a man-centered perspective. What does the passage reveal about God's nature, how He speaks and responds to people or events? This approach assumes that the Bible is God's way of making Himself known to us rather than giving us a formula for how to live. It's not a book on how to become the best version of ourselves, but on how to believe Him and take Him at His Word so that He can be and do in and through us what we could never become or do on our own. This is for His glory, not ours.

INTRO TO THE GOSPELS

I. Overview

- A. The Gospels are the first four books of the New Testament—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Together they stand as the historical record of the good news of the Kingdom of God and the Holy Spirit inspired witness to the foundation of our salvation through faith in the Messiah, Jesus Christ of Nazareth. They chronicle the birth, life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as well as the characters surrounding His life and ministry, including His family and disciples. To these He imparted the truths and authority of the Kingdom of God and raised them up as leaders who would birth the church age by the power of the Holy Spirit as told in the Book of Acts.
- B. Everything the Gospel authors carefully selected from oral tradition was designed to build a solid historical and theological case for Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah promised in the Old Testament. The momentum and focal point of each Gospel is the final week of Jesus' passion: His agony in the garden, trial and crucifixion, and resurrection and ascension. Every miracle, every teaching, every interaction recorded serves only to validate His identity in view of this end: His death and resurrection which secures not only our salvation individually, but eventually the restoration of the Jewish people and national Israel to their purpose and the created order back to its original design. With content intentionally weighted towards this final week, the Gospels become long introductions to a passion narrative. Matthew gives 8 chapters to the final week (21-28), Mark gives 6 (11-16), Luke gives 3 (22-24) and John gives 10 (12-21).
- C. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called the Synoptic Gospels because 90% of their content is the same, covering much of Jesus' ministry, especially around Galilee, in similar order. Synoptic means "together sight" or seeing together with a common view. Mark was written first, is the shortest and most simple Gospel (16 chapters). History teaches that Matthew and Luke benefitted from much of Mark's early research and writing. John's Gospel account is uniquely different from the other three. He had the advantage of writing around 90 A.D., some 30 years after the Synoptic Gospels were completed, possibly why his revelation of Jesus' divinity is so developed (the eternal, pre-existent Word of God and the "I AM")

II. Historical Background

- A. 33 A.D. Pentecost, birth of the Church in Jerusalem.
- B. 36 A.D. Stephen martyred and the first persecution of the Jewish believers begins.
- C. 34 - 44 A.D. Simon Magus is falsely converted in Samaria, rejected by Peter, and founds the Gnostics.

(Simon “adapted the teaching of the apostles to his own situation, later proclaiming in Samaria that he was the great power of God. Jesus had not redeemed the world when he died; his death was simply the failure of his mission. When Jesus failed, the Christ-spirit that was on him left to seek a new person to empower so that the message could continue. Whom did he find but Simon the magician?” (christian-history.org “Gnosticism”) Menander, a student of Simon, carried on his teachings in Antioch. Justin Martyr writes that there was a statue erected near Rome to Simon as a god.)

- D. 36 - 44 A.D. The Gospel reaches the Samaritans and Gentiles.
- E. 51 or 52 A.D. Paul appears before the Proconsul Gallio in Corinth after spending 18 months in the city (Acts 18:11-12)
- F. During the 50s and early 60s, pressure builds against the apostles and Gentile Christians. Gnostic teachings have to be refuted, as well as Messianic Judaizers who want Christians to mix Jesus’ teachings with adherence to the Torah for salvation.
- G. 64 A.D. The Roman emperor Nero begins persecution of Christians in Rome.
- H. 64 - 67 A.D. Peter (and likely Paul) martyred, possibly by Nero.
- I. Once the apostles begin to die out, the need increases for more written Gospels and epistles (letters from the apostles) to be circulated.

III. Overview of the 4 Gospels

- A. Summary of Matthew - (written around 60 A.D. as a synoptic gospel w/Mark & Luke)
 - 1. **Author** - Matthew, the tax collector, who became a disciple and apostle of Jesus.
 - 2. **Purpose** - Written to Greek speaking Jews, Matthew accentuates Jesus’ Jewishness from verse 1. Placed as the first Gospel and the “bridge” between covenants because it focuses heavily on the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (e.g., :), using 61 quotes from the Tanakh to make the case for Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus’ teachings point to the Kingdom of heaven and the blessings of the Kingdom being extended to Gentiles.
 - 3. **Theme** - “Kingdom of Heaven” - a phrase used exclusively by Matthew, the focus of 13 of Jesus’ “Kingdom Parables”. Jesus notices and rewards Kingdom attributes like faithful stewardship, righteousness, obedience, repentance, forgiveness, and humble leadership.
 - 4. **The Lion** of Ezekiel 1 - “Get ready...the King is here and His Kingdom is coming.”

- B. Summary of Mark (written early 50's A.D. as a synoptic gospel w/Matthew & Luke)
1. **Author** - Possibly the earliest Gospel. Written for a Roman audience in the early 50s A.D. by John Mark, a close associate of the apostle Peter.
 2. **Purpose** - To strengthen and guide Roman believers under an increasingly hostile government. Mark explains Jewish customs and interprets Aramaic words, keeping his account of Jesus' ministry shorter and more simple than the other Gospels.
 3. **Themes** - Mark's emphasis tends to be on Jesus' humanity and what Jesus did (action and miracles) more than what He said, moving quickly from one scene to the next, using the word "Immediately" 38 times to maintain a sense of decisive action. However, he bookends His account with the confident claim that Jesus Christ is the "Son of God" (1:1; 15:39).
 4. **The Ox** of Ezekiel 1 - "Jesus is the obedient Servant and Workman of the Lord."
- C. Summary of Luke (written around 63 A.D. as a synoptic gospel w/Matthew & Mark)
1. **Author** - Luke, a highly educated Gentile follower of Jesus and physician who travelled as a medical missionary with the apostle Paul and likely cared for Paul's health. Highly skilled in Greek language and culture. Accomplished historian and writer.
 2. **Purpose** - To provide Theophilus—possibly a wealthy government official in Antioch—with a detailed and historically accurate account of the events and facts surrounding Jesus' life and ministry so he could have full confidence in the truth of the Gospel of Jesus.
 3. **Themes** - 1. Jesus' humanity through the history of His early life, 2. the Holy Spirit's involvement in every aspect of the narrative, and 3. Jesus as Redeemer and Savior of the world, not just Jews, but all races, rich/poor, men/women, outcasts/respectable elites.
 4. **The Man** of Ezekiel 1 - "Jesus, the compassionate 'Son of Man', is the Redeemer of all the world."
- D. Summary of John (written 80-90 A.D.)
1. **Author** - John, one of Jesus' closest disciples and an apostle. Authored 1-3 John & Revelation.
 2. **Purpose** - Written to appeal to Greek thinking followers of Jesus with an evangelistic purpose. Focused on the Bible's most important message—to believe and follow Jesus, because He is the way to eternal life (3:16; 20:31).
 3. **Themes** - 1. Jesus' divinity: the pre-existent Word of God and "Lamb of God" along with Jesus' "I AM" declarations and the statement in 8:58 when he equals Himself with the Old Testament "I AM". 2. Crisis of belief: disciples' struggle to grasp the full revelation of His identity as Messiah while many choose offense and unbelief, and reject Him.
 4. **The Eagle** of Ezekiel 1 - "Believe Jesus is 'I AM' sent from the Father."

IV. Key Scriptures

- A. **John 1:29, 33b** "...the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! ...(He) will baptize with the Holy Spirit."
- B. **Luke 4:8** "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me..."
- C. **Matthew 22:37-40** "Love the Lord...love your neighbor"
- D. **Matthew 5-7** Sermon on the Mount (what the Kingdom looks like practically)
- E. **John 14:23, 15:10** "All who love Me will do what I say." "When you obey My commands, you remain in My love."
- F. **Matthew 28:19** "Go and make disciples of all the nations..."
- ★ G. **John 20:31** "These have been written so that you may believe Jesus is the Christ." (Here John gives the primary purpose of all 4 Gospels.)

V. Jesus' "I AM" Declarations

- A. **The Significance of "I AM"** from Exodus (OT) to The Book of John (NT)
 - 1. Then Moses said to God, "Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they say to me, 'What is His name?' what shall I say to them?" And God said to Moses, "**I AM WHO I AM.**" And He said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, '**I AM** has sent me to you.'" ..."Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: 'The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. (Exodus 3:13-15)
 - 2. "If you do not believe that **I AM**, you will die in your sins (John 8:24). They said to Him, "Who are You?" (Jn 8:25) "Before Abraham was, I AM." (John 8:58)
- B. **The 7 "I AM" Declarations** of Jesus in John's Gospel (purpose of bringing confidence in the Gospel of Jesus Christ against gnosticism and pagan/Christian syncretism).
 - 1. I AM the bread of life / bread which came down from heaven. (6:35-51)
 - 2. I AM the light of the world (8:12; 9:5)
 - 3. I AM the door of the sheep (10:7, 9)
 - 4. I AM the good shepherd (10:11, 14)
 - 5. I AM the resurrection and the life (11:17, 25)
 - 6. I AM the way, the truth, and the life (14:6)
 - 7. I AM the true vine (15:1, 5)

HOMEWORK: Read Matthew 1-4 and John 1-3 (2 chapters a day for 5 days). Circle or underline repeated words that emerge as key themes.

Example: In Matthew 2-3, notice how often the words "dream" and "prophet" or "prophets" are used. What overarching theme emerges through these repeated words/concepts? What does this theme reveal about the nature and character of God?