

Session 1 Why Four Gospels? Their Unique Purpose and Message

I. THE HOLY SPIRIT GAVE US FOUR DIFFERENT VIEWS OF JESUS IN THE GOSPELS

- A. Each of the four Gospels have many things in common—describing Jesus’ movements in ministry along with His teaching, miracles, death, and resurrection. Each gospel has a unique purpose and message, though the four together do not provide a complete biography of Jesus’ ministry.
- B. In Matthew, Jesus is presented as the *Son of David*—thus as the King of Israel.
- C. In Mark, Jesus is shown as the *Servant of God*—the leader who took on the form of a servant.
- D. In Luke, Jesus is seen as the *Son of Man* (humanity)—connected yet contrasted with fallen man.
- E. In John, Jesus is revealed as the *Son of God* (deity)— connected with the Father and His family.

II. THE FOUR FACES OF THE LIVING CREATURES

- A. John saw four living creatures around the throne of God (Rev. 4:7)
⁷The first living creature was like a lion, the second...like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle. (Rev. 4:7)
- B. *Matthew* corresponds with the face of a *lion*: The King of Israel. The lion is the king among beasts.
- C. *Mark* corresponds with the face of a *calf* (ox): The servant leader. The ox is known as an animal of service and sacrifice. This points to Jesus taking the form of a servant.
- D. *Luke* corresponds with the face of a *man*: The Son of Man. This corresponds with Jesus’ humanity.
- E. *John* corresponds with the face of the *eagle*: The Son of God. The eagle soars highest among birds.

III. THE MESSIAH AS THE BRANCH OF THE LORD

- A. Matthew’s gospel emphasizes Jesus as the King.
⁵“...I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign...” (Jer. 23:5)
- B. Mark’s gospel emphasizes Jesus as God’s servant.
⁸“For behold, I am bringing forth My Servant the Branch.” (Zech. 3:8)
- C. Luke’s gospel emphasizes Jesus’ humanity.
¹²“Behold, the Man whose name is the Branch!” (Zech. 6:12)
- D. John’s gospel emphasizes Jesus’ deity.
²In that day the Branch of the Lord shall be beautiful and glorious... (Isa. 4:2)

IV. THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW: THE SON OF DAVID AND KING OF ISRAEL

- A. Jesus as the Son of David is heir of Israel's throne—He is the rightful king of the Jews.
- B. Matthew presents Christ as the One who fulfilled the Old Testament promises and prophecies related to Israel's Messiah. The word "fulfilled" occurs in Matthew fifteen times, and there are more quotations from the Old Testament in Matthew than in the other three Gospels combined.
- C. Jesus is presented as King—This is seen twelve times.
- D. Matthew's first sentence gives us a key to the book (Mt. 1:1). David is the only king in the genealogy who is called "king" (Mt. 1:6). Notice that David is called king twice in one verse!
¹The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham...⁶and Jesse begot David the king. David the king begot Solomon by...the wife of Uriah. (Mt. 1:1, 6)
- E. Just as "son of David" connects Jesus with Israel's throne, so "son of Abraham" connects Him with Israel's land. Abraham was the one to whom the Lord initially gave the land. This is the only place in the New Testament where the land is called "the land of Israel" (Mt. 2:20-21).
- F. Matthew opens with the visit of the wise men from the East to worship the Christ Child, and the wise men inquire, "Where is He that is born King of the Jews?" They were not asking about a savior, but rather the King of the Jews. Mark, Luke and John do not mention this event.
- G. Matthew speaks of the disciples being sent to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Mt. 10:5-6).
- H. Only Matthew mentions the seven parables of the kingdom (Mt. 13).
- I. Only Matthew mentions "Jesus' throne of glory" in His millennial kingdom (Mt. 19:28; 25:31) and that all nations will be gathered to Him as the King (Mt. 25:31-40).
²⁸"Assuredly...in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (Mt. 19:28)
"When the Son of Man comes in His glory...He will sit on the throne of His glory. (Mt. 25:31)
- J. Matthew alone mentions the parable of the wedding feast of the King's Son (Mt. 22:2).
- K. Only Matthew mentions the sevenfold rebuke of the scribes and Pharisees (Mt. 23).
- L. In Matthew, it was the guilty Jews who cried, "His blood be on us and on our children" (Mt. 27:25)
- M. Matthew ends without any mention of the ascension, but with Jesus' declaration that "all power had been given to Him" (Mt. 28:18)—power is one of the primary distinctions of a king.
¹⁸And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...²⁰teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always..." (Mt. 28:18-20)

V. THE GOSPEL OF MARK: THE SERVANT OF GOD—SERVANT LEADERSHIP

- A. Mark's gospel focuses on Jesus as a servant. This explains why Mark did not mention a genealogy, the miraculous conception, the birth and wise men, or Jesus in the temple at age twelve. Why? This part of the life of Jesus did not fall within the main purpose of Mark. It also explains why there are more miracles recorded in Mark than any of the other gospels.
- B. In Mark, there are no rebukes to Israel and the Pharisees as in the other Gospels and no mention of Jesus cleansing the temple. Notice the omission of many of Jesus' divine titles from this gospel. In Mark, Jesus is not mentioned as King (except in derision). He is called "the Son of David" once.
- C. Mark begins abruptly compared to the lengthy introductions in Matthew, Luke, and John.
- D. A term occurring often in Mark's gospel is the Greek word *eutheos*, which is variously translated "immediately" or "at once." This word is over forty times in Mark's Gospel. There was no holding back, reluctance, or delay as Jesus did the Father's work. This word tells of the prompt nature of His service as well as the urgency He felt concerning His mission.
²⁰And immediately He called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants...²¹Then they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath. (Mk. 1:19-21)
- E. Mark mentioned Jesus' *hand* related to His service more than the others (Mk. 1:31, 41; 5:41; 7:32; 8:22-25; 9:27). In this, we can see the power, kindness, and tenderness of His hand and touch!

VI. THE GOSPEL OF LUKE: THE SON OF MAN—HUMANITY

- A. Luke's gospel deals with Jesus' humanity, presenting Him as the "Son of Man" instead of as the Son of David or the Son of God. This theme connects Christ with the whole earth.
- B. Luke gives us the fullest account of His birth. Luke traces Jesus' genealogy to Adam (Lk. 3), and he emphasizes Jesus as a friend of sinners (Lk. 7:34, 15:2; 19:7) and as a man of prayer (Lk. 3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:28-29; 11:1; 5-8; 18:1-8; 22:31-32; 22:41,44; 23:34).
- C. Luke presents Jesus as subject to human circumstances, as seeking the lost (Lk. 15), weeping over Jerusalem (Lk. 19:41), showing compassion, eating food with people (Lk. 7:36; 11:37; 14:1; 19:7; 24:30, 42, 43). He also emphasized the role of women in Jesus' ministry (Lk. 8:1-3).
- D. Only Luke called the place of Jesus' death by its Gentile name—*Calvary* (23:33). Luke wrote, "A superscription was written in letters of Greek, Latin, and Hebrew, 'This is the King of the Jews'" (23:38). This hints at the international scope of this gospel! Matthew and Mark do not record the "superscription" written in the world-languages of the day because it was not within their scope.
- E. Luke is the only one who records the parable of the Good Samaritan showing His heart for people.
- F. In Luke the One born is not called "The King of the Jews," but *Savior of all people*. This title reaches out beyond the confines of Israel and takes in the Gentiles too.

¹¹There is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. (Lk 2:11)

VII. THE GOSPEL OF JOHN: THE SON OF GOD—DEITY

- A. John's gospel presents Jesus as the Son of God and His relationship with the family of God. John's gospel emphasizes Christ's divine glories. He is the Word "in the beginning" with God and is declared to be God. Notice how different John's introductory statements are from the other gospels.
¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things were made through Him... (Jn. 1:1-3)
- B. As the Son of David and the Son of Man we see Jesus' connection to the earth— but as the Son of God, we see His connection with Father in heaven. John described Jesus as dwelling "with God" before creation (1:1, 2), "the only Begotten of the Father" (1:14), the very "Son of God" (1:34).
- C. The theme of the deity of Christ is central as no other Gospel presents the Godhead of Jesus so clearly. Today many are drifting from Truth, so we must clearly and regularly present Jesus' deity.
⁹For in Him [Jesus] dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily... (Col. 2:9)
- D. Thirty-five times in this Gospel, Jesus speaks of God as "My Father."
- E. Seven people affirm Jesus' deity in this gospel—John the Baptist: (1:34); Nathaniel (1:49); Peter (6:69); Jesus Himself (10:36); Martha (11:27); Thomas (20:28) and John (20:31).
- F. No parables are found in John's gospel. Jesus taught in parables to conceal truth from those who had rejected Him. In John's gospel, Christ is not concealing truth, but revealing God. A popular yet inadequate definition of Christ's parables is *telling earthly stories with a heavenly meaning*.
- G. Only John declared the following divine titles and statements—Jesus revealed as "the Word" (1:1) and declared to be the creator of all things (1:3); "the only Begotten of the Father" (1:14) and "the Lamb of God" (1:29); "the "Light of the world" (8:12); "the Bread of God who gives life to the world" (6:35); "Before Abraham was, I am" (8:58); "I and Father are One" (10:30). "He who has seen Me, has seen the Father" (14:9). "I am in the Father, and the Father in Me" (14:10).
- H. In the Sabbath controversy, John records a different reply—Jesus insisted on the right to do works of mercy on the Sabbath by appealing to having a higher authority, "My Father and I work" (5:17).
¹⁷Jesus answered them, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working."
¹⁸Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God. (Jn. 5:17-18)
- I. Jesus is revealed as the great "I am" with a 7-fold fullness—"I am the bread of life" (6:35); "I am the light of the world" (9:5); "I am the door" (10:7); "I am the good shepherd" (10:11); "I am the resurrection" (11:25); "I am the way, truth, and life" (14:6); "I am the vine" (15:1).