

# The Four Gospels: Some Comparative Overview Charts

by Felix Just, S.J., Ph.D.

## Historical Background Issues:

GOSPEL acc. to...	MARK	MATTHEW	LUKE	JOHN
WHO? traditionally attributed author?	"John Mark of Jerusalem" (Acts 12:12; 15:37; Col 4:10; Phlm 1:24; 1Pet 5:13)	tax collector & apostle (Mark 3:18; Matt 9:9; 10:3; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13)	physician & companion of Paul (Col 4:14; 2Tim 4:11; Phlm 1:24 only)	John, son of Zebedee; one of 12 apostles (Mark 1:19; 3:17; cf. John 21:2)
WHO? implied author?	bilingual (Aramaic & Greek) Christian of the 2nd generation; "young man" of 14:51-52?	multi-lingual (Aramaic & Greek) early Jewish Christian; trained "scribe" of 13:52?	Gentile Christian convert; well educated Greek "historian"; client of Theophilus (1:1-4)?	the "beloved disciple" and his Jewish Christian followers (19:35; 21:20-24)
TO WHOM? implied audience?	mostly Gentiles, fairly new in their faith, and facing persecutions	better educated Jews who believe in Jesus, but argue over the Law	wealthier Gentile Christians in an urban setting, becoming complacent	very mixed: mostly Jews, some Gentiles, Samaritans, etc.
WHERE? written from and/or to?	probably Rome; possibly Decapolis, Syria or Alexandria?	possibly Galilee; probably in or near Antioch in Syria	probably Greece; possibly Syria/Antioch (Pauline missions)	originally Galilee or Syria; traditionally Ephesus (Asia Minor)
WHEN? approximate date?	first written "Gospel"; very late 60's or early 70's (Jewish War 66-70)	late 70's or 80's (w/ older sources, incl. one written by Matthew?)	mid to late 80's (incl. "many" earlier written sources)	main edition 90's (early edition 50's? epilogue after 100?)
WHAT? subtype of "Gospel" genre?	narrated "good news" (1:1) about Jesus, esp. his actions & his death	book of "heritage" of Jesus (1:1) & much of his "teaching" (28:20)	an "orderly account" for attaining "secure knowledge" (1:1-4)	much "testimony" and "signs" for believers (20:30-31; 21:24-25)
WHY? community circumstances & author's purpose?	to encourage a group undergoing difficult trials and persecutions	to teach a community with internal divisions and external enemies	to challenge believers to put their faith into practice more fully	to strengthen a group ostracized by other Jews for their faith

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## Literary, Stylistic and Thematic Comparisons:

#	GOSPEL acc. to...	MARK	MATTHEW	LUKE	JOHN
1	Number of chapters (verses and words)	16 ( 678 / 11304 )	28 ( 1071 / 18345 )	24 ( 1151 / 19482 )	21 ( 879 / 15635 )
2	Style of Greek	grammatically poor	Semitic influenced	good, elegant, literary	simple, but highly symbolic
3	Geographical Focus	Galilean towns & villages; some Gentile territory	Galilee, esp. mountains; mostly Jewish areas	one long journey to the goal: Jerusalem	multiple visits back & forth to Jerusalem
4	Literary Features	quick action ("and then"; immediately."); loosely connected episodes	five major discourses; well-organized sections of collected pericopes	stories often in pairs (esp. male/female characters); many extra parables	"Amen, Amen, I say to you."; irony; paradox; double-meanings
5	Literary Introduction	"Beginning of Good News" (1:1)	"Book of Genealogy" (1:1)	"Orderly Account" (1:1-4)	Cosmic Hymn (1:1-18)
6	Gospel Beginning	John the Baptist's preaching; Jesus' ministry begins (1:2-15)	Jesus' heritage: David (royal), Abraham (Jewish), Emmanuel (God with us)	parallel birth stories: John the Baptist & Jesus (1:5-2:52)	J. B. points to "Lamb of God"; first disciples come (1:19-51)
7	Birth of Jesus (narrative emphasis)	Jesus' birth is not narrated; but he's called "Son of Mary" (6:3) and "the Nazarene" (14:67)	focus on men: David, Joseph, Herod, Magi; power: King of Jews? murder of infants!	focus on women: Elizabeth, Mary, Anna; angels; shepherds; Holy Spirit	theology of incarnation: "Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (1:14)
8	Inaugural Event	Exorcism in Synagogue of Capernaum (1:21-28)	Sermon on the Mount: Fulfillment of Torah/Law (ch. 5-7)	Jubilee reading from Isa 61: Rejection at Nazareth (4:14-30)	Wedding Feast at Cana: first of Jesus' "signs" (2:1-11)
9	Jesus' Major Opponents	1- Pharisees & Herodians; 2- chief priests, scribes & elders	"scribes & Pharisees"; "hypocrites & blind guides"	unjust authorities (civil & religious); rich & corrupt people	"the Jews" (esp. leaders in Jerusalem); Pharisees; High Priest Caiaphas
10	Jesus' [Seven] Last Words on the Cross	"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (15:34)	[same as in Mark] (Mt 27:46)	"Father, forgive them..." (22:34); "You will be with me in Paradise" (23:43); "Father, into your hands I commend my Spirit" (23:46)	"Woman, behold, your son"; "Behold, your mother" (19:26-27); "I am thirsty" (19:28); "It is finished" (19:30)
11	Focus of Passion	death as tragedy (ch. 14-15)	plots & treachery (ch. 26-27)	Jesus' innocence (ch. 22-23)	Jesus' exaltation (ch. 18-19)
12	Last Major Event	Empty Tomb, outside of Jerusalem (16:1-8)	Great Commission, on Mountain in Galilee (28:16-20)	Ascension, from Bethany just East of Jerusalem (24:50-53)	1: disciples & Thomas (20:19-29) 2: [Peter & Beloved Disciple (21:1-23)]
13	Final Literary Ending	women leave tomb in fear &	Jesus tells the disciples, "I am	disciples return to Jerusalem	1: many more signs (20:30-31)

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		silence (16:8) [16:9-20 added only later]	with you always" (28:20)	temple with joy praising God (24:53)	2: [many other books 21:24-25]
	<b>GOSPEL acc. to...</b>	<b>MARK</b>	<b>MATTHEW</b>	<b>LUKE</b>	<b>JOHN</b>
14	Christology I: Main Titles for Jesus	Christ/Messiah & Son of God; Suffering Son of Man; Eschatological Judge	Son of David & Son of Abraham; New Lawgiver; Great Teacher (like Moses); Emmanuel; King of Jews	a great Prophet (in word & deed); Lord (of all nations); Savior (esp. of the poor)	Eternal Logos; Divine Word made Flesh; Only-begotten Son; sent from Father; Passover Lamb; "I Am" / "Equal to God"
15	Christology II: Jesus' Major Actions	miracles; overcoming evil powers; arguing with religious authorities	teaching disciples; decrying religious hypocrisy	healing sick & impaired people; forgiving sinners & debtors	speaking God's words; doing God's works; revealing God and himself
16	Discipleship I: Teachings about Disc.	persevere in faith despite suffering; follow Jesus "on the way" to the cross; be ready for his return	be righteous; forgive always; live ethically (Golden Rule); fulfill God's commands, esp. in charitable deeds	leave everything to follow Jesus; share with poor; accept everyone, esp. outcasts, women, enemies	see, believe, know, remain in Jesus & God, despite hostility; love one another; be in unity; serve humbly
17	Discipleship II: Role Models for Disc.	anon. women (5:25; 7:24; 12:41; 14:3); Jairus (5:21); Bartimaeus (10:46)	Peter (16:13-20); children (18:1-5); faithful servants (24:45-25:46)	Mary (1:26-2:51); Good Samaritan (10:25-37); Zacchaeus (19:1-10)	John Bapt. (ch. 1); blind man (ch. 9); Martha (11:27); the B.D. (13:23ff); Mary Magd. (20:1-18)
18	Eschatological Expectations	imminent and suddenly, but no one knows when; so "Keep awake!" (13:1-37)	false prophets will arise; many will fall away; Gospel must first be preached to all (24:10-14)	after Jerusalem is destroyed & Gentiles' time is fulfilled; not so soon; pray! (21:20-24, 28, 36)	realized eschatology; all who hear & believe have eternal life already now and are not judged (5:21-25)
19	Basis for Final Judgment	whether you persevere in faith despite persecutions (13:13)	what you do for "the least" people; Sheep & Goats parable (25:31-46)	how you use wealth / possessions; parables of Rich & Poor (16:1- 31)	whether or not you believe in Jesus (3:16-18; 5:19-24; 12:44- 50)
20	Other Major Themes	Messianic secret; main disciples don't understand, but minor characters do believe	fulfillment of Scripture; divisions within the community; final separation of good vs. bad	fulfillment of God's plan; eschatological reversal; tax collectors & sinners favored	"eternal life" = "life in his name"; Paraclete = Holy Spirit; Xn unity; mutual indwelling of God/Jesus/us
21	Evang. Symbols (cf. Rev 4:7)	Lion	Human [or Angel]	Ox	Eagle
22	Liturgical Feast Day	April 25	September 21	October 18	December 27
23	Sunday Lectionary	Year B	Year A	Year C	mixed, esp. Lent & Easter
24	Typical Portrait	Jesus on the Cross	Sermon on the Mount	Jesus Heals the Sick	Christ the Revealer
25	Emphasized by Whom?	Modern Historians (oldest historical account)	Catholics (esp. Church structures)	Protestants (esp. social justice focus)	Orthodox Xns (esp. <i>logos</i> Christology)

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## Structural and Geographical Comparisons:

GOSPEL acc. to...	MARK	MATT	LUKE	JOHN
Approximate Date	very late 60's	late 70's (or 80's)	(late 70's) or 80's	late 80's or 90's
Introduction: Literary Preface Genealogy Infancy Narrative	<b>1:1</b> 1:1 ("good news") xxx xxx	<b>1:1—2:23</b> xxx 1:1-17 1:18—2:23	<b>1:1—2:52</b> 1:1-4 ("orderly account") [3:23-38] 1:5—2:52	<b>1:1-18</b> (prologue) 1:1-18 ("Word of God") xxx [1:14]
Preparatory Episodes: John Baptist's Preaching Baptism of Jesus Temptation of Jesus	<b>1:2-13</b> 1:2-8 1:9-11 1:12-13	<b>3:1—4:11</b> 3:1-12 3:13-17 4:1-11	<b>3:1—4:13</b> 3:1-20 3:21-22 4:1-13	<b>1:1-51</b> 1:19-36 [1:31-33] xxx
Jesus' Early Ministry, mostly to Jews in Galilee: Initial Preaching Call of First Disciples Outside of Galilee	<b>1:14—8:21</b> 1:14-15 1:16-20 5:1-20; 7:24—8:13	<b>4:12—16:12</b> 4:12-17 4:18-22 8:28-34; 15:21-28	<b>4:14—9:17</b> 4:14-30 5:1-11 8:26-39; xxx	[Ch. 2, 4, 6]  xxx 1:35-51 xxx
On the Way to Jerusalem Initial Stages 1st Passion Prediction 2nd Passion Prediction To Jerusalem Itself 3rd Passion Prediction	<b>8:22—10:52</b> 8:22—9:50 8:31-33 9:30-32 10:1-52 10:32-34	<b>16:13—20:34</b> 16:13-18:35 16:21-23 17:22-23 19:1—20:34 20:17-19	<b>9:18—19:27</b> 9:18-50 9:22 9:43b-45 <b>9:51—19:27</b> 18:31-34	[xxx] [7:1-9] xxx xxx [2:13; 5:1; 7:10] xxx
Ministry in Jerusalem Teachings & Disputes Eschatological Discourse	<b>11:1—13:37</b> 11:1—12:44 13:1-37	<b>21:1—25:46</b> 21:1—23:39 24:1-36	<b>19:28—21:38</b> 19:1—21:4 21:5-36	[Ch. 3, 5, 7-12] most of this xxx
Passion Week Last Supper Crucifixion	<b>14:1—15:47</b> 14:17-31 15:22-41	<b>26:1—27:66</b> 26:20-35 27:33-56	<b>22:1—23:56</b> 22:14 -38 23:33-49	<b>13:1—19:42</b> 13:1—17:26 19:17-37
Resurrection Narrative Empty Tomb Story Appearance Stories	<b>16:1-8</b> 16:1-8 xxx [16:9-20 added later]	<b>28:1-20</b> 28:1-8 28:9-10, 16-20	<b>24:1-53</b> 24:1-12 24:13-53	<b>20:1-31</b> [21:1-25 added later] 20:1-13 20:14-31; 21:1-25