

Detailed Introduction to the Gospels

The purpose of this document is to provide the reader with a detailed introduction to the four Gospels – **Matthew**, **Mark**, **Luke** and **John**. The content afforded is not a full, scholarly study of the book, but more like “Cliff Notes.” It is hoped that you gain a sense of the flow of the narrative, the meaning and the intent of the book, especially as it pertains to faith and salvation, and the uniqueness that each Gospel provides in revealing to us the person of Jesus Christ.

Matthew

The Gospel according to Matthew is placed first of the four gospels. This reflects both view that it was the first to be written, a view that goes back to the late second century A.D., and the esteem in which it was held by the church; no other was so frequently quoted by non-Scriptural literature of earliest Christianity. Although the majority of scholars now hold Mark as the first of the gospels, the high estimation of this work remains. The reason for that becomes clear upon reading the way in which Matthew presents his story of Jesus, the way in which he describes the demands of Christian discipleship, and his description of the breaking-in of the new and final age through the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

One possible outline of the Gospel according to Matthew is the following:

- I. The Infancy Narrative (1:1-2:23)
- II. The Proclamation of the Kingdom (3:1-7:29)
- III. Ministry and Mission in Galilee (8:1-11:1)
- IV. Opposition from Israel (11:2-13:53)
- V. Jesus, the Kingdom, and the Church (13:54-18:35)
- VI. Ministry in Judea and Jerusalem (19:1-25:46)
- VII. The Passion and Resurrection (26:1-28:20)

The Infancy Narratives (Matthew 1:1-2:23)

The gospel begins with a **narrative prologue** (Matthew 1:1-2:23), the first part of which is a genealogy of Jesus starting with Abraham, the father of Israel (Matthew 1:1-17). Yet at the beginning of that genealogy Jesus is designated as “the son of David, the son of Abraham” (Matthew 1:1). David, the kingly ancestor who lived about a thousand years after Abraham is named first. This shows Matthew’s intention about the genealogy: to show Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah, the royal anointed one (Matthew 1:16).

In the first of the episodes of the infancy narrative that follow the genealogy, the mystery of Jesus' person is declared. He is **conceived of a virgin** by the power of the Spirit of God (Matthew 1:18-25). The first of the gospel's fulfillment citations occurs here (Matthew 1:23): “*he shall be named Emmanuel, for in him God is with us.*” A fulfillment citation has the purpose of showing that Jesus was the one to whom the prophecies of Israel were pointing,

The announcement of the birth of this newborn king of the Jews in **Bethlehem** greatly troubles not only King Herod but all Jerusalem (Matthew 2:1-3), yet the **Gentile magi** (also traditionally known as the “Three Kings”) are overjoyed to find Jesus and offer him their homage and their gifts (Matthew 2:10-11). Even as Jesus is starting to be rejected by the mass of his own people, there is the foreshadowing of his acceptance by the Gentile nations. Jesus must be taken to **Egypt to escape** the murderous plan of Herod. By his sojourn there and his subsequent return

after the king's death Jesus relives the Exodus experience of Israel. The words of the Lord spoken through the prophet Hosea, “*Out of Egypt I called my son,*” are fulfilled in him (Matthew 2:15); if Israel was God's son, Jesus is so surpassing the dignity of that nation, as his marvelous birth and the unfolding of his story show (see Matthew 3:17; 4:1-11; 11:27; 14:33; 16:16; 27:54).

Back in the land of Israel, he must be taken to **Nazareth in Galilee** because of the danger to his life in Judea, where Herod's son Archelaus is now ruling (Matthew 2:22-23). The sufferings of Jesus in the infancy narrative anticipate those of his passion. If his life is spared in spite of the dangers, it is because his destiny is finally to give it on the cross as “*a ransom for many*” (20, 28). Thus the word of the angel will be fulfilled, “. . . *he will save his people from their sins*” (Matthew 1:21; cf Matthew 26:28).

The Proclamation of the Kingdom (Matthew 3:1-7:29)

In Matthew 4:12 the gospel writer begins his account of the **ministry of Jesus**, introducing it by the preparatory preaching of John the Baptist (Matthew 3:1-12), the **baptism of Jesus** that culminates in God's proclaiming him his “beloved Son” (Matthew 3:13-17), and the **temptation** in which he reveals his true Divine Sonship by his victory over the devil's attempt to deflect him from the way of obedience to the Father (Matthew 4:1-11).

The **central message of Jesus' preaching** is the coming of the kingdom of heaven and the need for repentance (a complete change of heart and conduct) on the part of those who are to receive this great gift of God (Matthew 4:17). Galilee is the setting for most of his ministry.

In this extensive material there are **five great discourses of Jesus**, each concluding with the formula “When Jesus finished these words” or ones very similar (Matthew 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). These are an important structure of the gospel. In every case the discourse is preceded by a narrative section, each narrative and discourse together constitute something like a “section” within the gospel. The discourses are:

- the “Sermon on the Mount” (Matthew 5:3-7:27),
- the missionary discourse (Matthew 10:5-42),
- the parable discourse (Matthew 13:3-52),
- the “church order” discourse (Matthew 18:3-35), and
- the eschatological discourse (Matthew 24:4-25:46).

In the “**Sermon on the Mount**” the theme of righteousness is prominent, and even at this early stage of the ministry the note of opposition is struck between Jesus and the Pharisees, who are designated as “the hypocrites” (Matthew 6:2, 5, 16). The righteousness of his disciples must surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees; otherwise, in spite of their alleged following of Jesus, they will not enter into the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:20). **Righteousness** means doing the will of the heavenly Father (Matthew 7:21), and his will is proclaimed in a manner that is startling to all who have identified it with the law of Moses. The Sermon (Matthew 5:21-48) both accept (Matthew 5:21-30, 43-48) and reject (Matthew 5:31-42) elements of that law, and in the former case the understanding of the law's demands is deepened and extended. This Sermon is the best commentary on the meaning of Jesus' claim that he has come not to abolish but to fulfill the law (Matthew 5:17). What is meant by fulfillment of the law is not the demand to keep it exactly as it stood before the coming of Jesus, but rather his bringing the law to be a lasting expression of the will of God, and in that fulfillment there is much that will pass away. Should this appear contradictory to his saying that “until heaven and earth pass away” not even the

smallest part of the law will pass (Matthew 5:18), that time of fulfillment is not the dissolution of the universe but the coming of the new age, which will occur with Jesus' death and resurrection. While righteousness in the new age will continue to mean conduct that is in accordance with the law, it will be conduct in accordance with the law as expounded and interpreted by Jesus (cf Matthew 28:20, “. . . all that I have commanded you”).

Though Jesus speaks harshly about the **Pharisees** in the Sermon, his judgment is not solely a condemnation of them. The Pharisees are portrayed as a negative example for his disciples, and his condemnation of those who claim to belong to him while disobeying his word is no less severe (Matthew 7:21-23, 26-27).

Ministry and Mission in Galilee (Matthew 8:1-11:1)

In Matthew 4:23 a summary statement of Jesus' activity speaks not only of his teaching and proclaiming the gospel but of his “*curing every disease and illness among the people*”; this is repeated almost verbatim in Matthew 9:35. The narrative section that follows the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 8:1-9:38) is composed principally of **accounts of those merciful deeds of Jesus**, but it is far from being simply a collection of stories about miraculous cures. The nature of the community that Jesus will establish is shown;

- it will always be under the protection of him whose power can deal with all dangers (Matt 8:23-27),
- but it is only for those who are prepared to follow him at whatever cost (Matt 8:16-22),
- not only believing Israelites but Gentiles who have come to faith in him (Matt 8:10-12).

The disciples begin to have some insight, however imperfect, into the **mystery of Jesus' person**. They wonder about him whom “*the winds and the sea obey*” (Matthew 8:27), and they witness his bold declaration of the forgiveness of the paralytic's sins (Matthew 9:2). That episode of the narrative moves on two levels. When the crowd sees the cure that testifies to the authority of Jesus, the Son of Man, to forgive sins (Matthew 9:6), they glorify God “*who had given such authority to human beings*” (Matthew 9:8). The forgiveness of sins is now not the prerogative of Jesus alone but of “human beings,” that is, of the disciples who constitute the community of Jesus, the church. The ecclesial character of this narrative section is clearly indicated.

The end of the section prepares for the discourse on the **church's mission** (Matthew 10:5-42). Jesus is moved to pity at the sight of the crowds who are like sheep without a shepherd (Matthew 9:36), and he sends out the twelve disciples to make the proclamation with which his own ministry began, “*The kingdom of heaven is at hand*” (Matthew 10:7; cf Matthew 4:17), and to drive out demons and cure the sick as he has done (Matthew 10:1). Their mission is limited to Israel (Matthew 10:5-6) as Jesus' own was (Matthew 15:24), yet in Matthew 15:16 that perspective broadens and the discourse begins to speak of the mission that the disciples will have after the resurrection and of the severe persecution that will attend it (Matthew 10:18). Again, the discourse moves on two levels: that of the time of Jesus and that of the time of the church.

Opposition from Israel (Matthew 11:2-13:53)

The narrative of the third section (Matthew 11:2-12:50) deals with the **growing opposition** to Jesus. Hostility toward him has already been manifested (Matthew 8:10; 9:3, 10-13, 34), but here it becomes more intense. The rejection of Jesus comes, as before, from Pharisees, who take “counsel against him to put him to death” (Matthew 12:14) and repeat their earlier accusation that he drives out demons because he is in league with demonic power (Matthew 12:22-24). But

they are not alone in their rejection. Jesus complains of the lack of faith of “this generation” of Israelites (Matthew 11:16-19) and reproaches the towns “where most of his mighty deeds had been done” for not heeding his call to repentance (Matthew 11:20-24). This dark picture is relieved by Jesus' praise of the Father who has enabled “the childlike” to accept him (Matthew 11:25-27), but on the whole the story is one of opposition to his word and blindness to the meaning of his deeds. The whole section ends with his declaring that not even the most intimate blood relationship with him counts for anything; his only true relatives are those who do the will of his heavenly Father (Matthew 12:48-50).

The narrative of rejection leads up to the **parable discourse** (Matthew 13:3-52). There are seven parables that are told in this chapter:

- The Sower: (Matt. 13:1-23)
- The Wheat and Tares (Matt. 13:24-30)
- The Mustard Seed (Matt. 13:31-32)
- The Leaven (Matt. 13:33-35)
- The Hidden Treasure (Matt. 13:44)
- The Pearl Of Great Value (Matt. 13:45-46)
- The Net Thrown Into the Sea (Matt. 13:47-50)

The reason given for Jesus' speaking to the crowds in parables is that they have hardened themselves against his clear teaching, unlike the disciples to whom knowledge of “*the mysteries of the kingdom has been granted*” (Matthew 13:10-16). In Matthew 13:36 he dismisses the crowds and continues the discourse to his disciples alone, who claim, at the end, to have understood all that he has said (Matthew 13:51). But, lest the impression be given that the church of Jesus is made up only of true disciples, the explanation of the parable of the weeds among the wheat (Matthew 13:37-43), as well as the parable of the net thrown into the sea “*which collects fish of every kind*” (Matthew 13:47-49), shows that it is composed of both the righteous and the wicked, and that separation between the two will be made only at the time of the final judgment.

Jesus, the Kingdom, and the Church (Matthew 13:54-18:35)

In the narrative that constitutes the first part of the fourth section of the gospel (Matthew 13:54-17:27), Jesus is shown preparing for the establishment of his **church** with its **teaching authority** that will supplant the blind guidance of the Pharisees (Matthew 15:13-14), whose teaching, curiously said to be that of the Sadducees also, is repudiated by Jesus as the norm for his disciples (Matthew 16:6, 11-12). The church of Jesus will be built on Peter (Matthew 16:18), who will be given **authority to bind and loose on earth**, an authority whose exercise will be confirmed in heaven (Matthew 16:19). The metaphor of binding and loosing has a variety of meanings, among them that of giving authoritative teaching. This promise is made to Peter directly after he has confessed Jesus to be the Messiah, the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:16), a confession that he has made as the result of revelation given to him by the heavenly Father (Matthew 16:17).

Directly after that confession Jesus begins to instruct his disciples about how he must go the way of suffering and death (Matthew 16:21). Peter, who has been praised for his confession, protests against this and receives from Jesus the sharpest of rebukes for attempting to deflect Jesus from his God-appointed destiny. The future rock upon whom the church will be built is still a man of “little faith” (see Matthew 14:31). Both he and the other disciples must know not only that Jesus

will have to suffer and die but that they too will have to follow him on the way of the cross if they are truly to be his disciples (Matthew 16:24-25).

The discourse following this narrative (Matthew 18:1-35) is often called the “**church order**” discourse, although that title is perhaps misleading since the emphasis is not on the structure of the church but on the care that the disciples must have for one another in respect to **guarding each other's faith** in Jesus (Matthew 18:6-7), to **seeking out** those who have wandered from the fold (Matthew 18:10-14), and to **repeated forgiving** of their fellow disciples who have offended them (Matthew 18:21-35). But there is also the obligation to **correct the sinful fellow Christian** and, should one refuse to be corrected, separation from the community is demanded (Matthew 18:15-18).

Ministry in Judea and Jerusalem (Matthew 19:1-25:46)

The narrative of the fifth section (Matthew 19:1-23:39) begins with the departure of Jesus and his disciples from Galilee for Jerusalem. In the course of their journey Jesus for the third time predicts the **passion** that awaits him at Jerusalem and also his **resurrection** (Matthew 20:17-19). At his entrance into the city he is hailed as the Son of David by the crowds accompanying him (Matthew 21:9). He **cleanses the temple** (Matthew 21:12-17), and in the few days of his Jerusalem ministry he engages in a series of controversies with the Jewish religious leaders (Matthew 21:23-27; 22:15-22, 23-33, 34-40, 41-46), meanwhile speaking parables against them (Matthew 21:28-32, 33-46), against all those Israelites who have rejected God's invitation to the messianic banquet (Matthew 22:1-10), and against all, Jew and Gentile, who have accepted but have shown themselves unworthy of it (Matthew 22:11-14). Once again, the perspective of the evangelist includes not only the time of Jesus' ministry but that of the preaching of the gospel after his resurrection. The narrative culminates in Jesus' denunciation of the scribes and Pharisees, reflecting not only his own opposition to them but that of Matthew's church (Matthew 23:1-36), and in Jesus' lament over Jerusalem (Matthew 23:37-39).

In the discourse of the fifth section (Matthew 24:1-25:46), Jesus predicts the **destruction of the temple** and his own final coming. The time of the latter is unknown (Matthew 24:36, 44), and the disciples are exhorted in various parables to live in readiness for it, a readiness that entails faithful attention to the duties of the interim period (Matthew 24:45-25:30). The coming of Jesus will bring with it the great judgment by which the everlasting destiny of all will be determined (Matthew 25:31-46).

The Passion and Resurrection (Matthew 26:1-28:20)

The story of **Jesus' passion and resurrection** (Matthew 26:1-28:20), the climax of the gospel, throws light on all that has preceded. In Matthew “righteousness” means both the faithful response to the will of God demanded of all to whom that will is announced and also the saving activity of God for his people (see Matthew 3:15; 5:6; 6:33). The passion supremely exemplifies both meanings of that central Matthean word. In Jesus' absolute faithfulness to the Father's will that he drink the cup of suffering (Matthew 26:39), the incomparable model for Christian obedience is given; in his death “for the forgiveness of sins” (Matthew 26:28), the saving power of God is manifested as never before.

Matthew's portrayal of Jesus in his passion combines both the majestic serenity of the obedient Son who goes his destined way in fulfillment of the scriptures (Matthew 26:52-54), confident of his ultimate vindication by God, and the depths of fear and abandonment that he feels in face of

death (Matthew 26:38-39; 27:46). These two aspects are expressed by an Old Testament theme that occurs often in the narrative, i.e., the portrait of the suffering Righteous One who complains to God in his misery, but is certain of eventual deliverance from his terrible ordeal.

The passion-resurrection of God's Son means nothing less than the turn of the ages, a new stage of history, the coming of the Son of Man in his kingdom (Matthew 28:18; cf Matthew 16:28). That is the sense of the apocalyptic signs that accompany Jesus' death (Matthew 27:51-53) and resurrection (Matthew 28:2). Although the old age continues, as it will until the manifestation of Jesus' triumph at his parousia, the final age has now begun. This is known only to those who have seen the Risen One and to those, both Jews and Gentiles, who have believed in their announcement of Jesus' triumph and have themselves become his disciples (cf Matthew 28:19). To them he is constantly, though invisibly, present (Matthew 28:20), verifying the name Emmanuel, "God is with us" (cf Matthew 1:23).

Mark

This shortest of all New Testament gospels is likely the **first to have been written**, yet it often tells of Jesus' ministry in more detail than either Matthew or Luke (for example, the miracle stories at Mark 5:1-20 or Mark 9:14-29). It recounts what Jesus did in a vivid style, where one incident breathlessly follows directly upon another. Mark stresses Jesus' message about the **kingdom of God** now breaking into human life as good news (Mark 1:14-15) and **Jesus himself as the gospel of God** (Mark 1:1; 8:35; 10:29). Jesus is the Son whom God has sent to **rescue humanity** by serving and by sacrificing his life (Mark 10:45).

The principal divisions of the Gospel according to Mark are the following:

- I. The Preparation for the Public Ministry of Jesus (Mark 1:1-13)
- II. The Mystery of Jesus (Mark 1:14-8:26)
- III. The Mystery Begins to Be Revealed (Mark 8:27-9:32)
- IV. The Full Revelation of the Mystery (Mark 9:33-16:8)
The Longer Ending (Mark 16:9-20)

The Preparation for the Public Ministry of Jesus (Mark 1:1-13)

The opening verse about good news in Mark (Mark 1:1) serves as a title for the entire book. The action begins with the appearance of John the Baptist, a messenger of God attested by scripture. But John points to a mightier one, Jesus, at whose baptism God speaks from heaven, declaring Jesus his Son. The Spirit descends upon Jesus, who eventually, it is promised, will baptize "*with the holy Spirit.*" This presentation of who Jesus really is (Mark 1:1-13) is rounded out with a brief reference to the temptation of Jesus and how Satan's attack fails. Jesus as Son of God will be victorious, a point to be remembered as one reads of Jesus' death and the enigmatic ending to Mark's Gospel.

The Mystery of Jesus (Mark 1:14-8:26)

The key verses at Mark 1:14-15, which are programmatic, summarize what Jesus proclaims as gospel: fulfillment, the nearness of the kingdom, and therefore the need for repentance and for faith. After the call of the first four disciples, all fishermen (Mark 1:16-20), we see Jesus engaged in **teaching** (Mark 1:21, 22, 27), **preaching** (Mark 1:38, 39), and **healing** (Mark 1:29-31, 34, 40-45), and exorcising demons (1, 22-27.34.39). The content of Jesus' teaching is only

rarely stated, and then chiefly in **parables about the kingdom** (Mark 4). His cures, especially on the sabbath (Mark 3:1-5); his claim, like God, to **forgive sins** (Mark 2:3-12); his **table fellowship** with tax collectors and sinners (Mark 2:14-17); and the statement that his followers need not now fast but should rejoice while Jesus is present (Mark 2:18-22), all stir up opposition that will lead to Jesus' death (Mark 3:6).

In Mark, Jesus is portrayed as immensely popular with the people in Galilee during his ministry (Mark 2:2; 3:7; 4:1). He **appoints twelve disciples** to help preach and drive out demons, just as he does (Mark 3:13-19). He continues to work many miracles; the blocks Mark 4:35-6:44 and Mark 6:45-7:10 are cycles of stories about healings, miracles at the Sea of Galilee, and marvelous feedings of the crowds. Jesus' teaching in Mark 7 exalts the word of God over "the tradition of the elders" and sees defilement as a matter of the heart, not of unclean foods. Yet opposition mounts. Scribes charge that Jesus is possessed by Beelzebul (Mark 3:22). His relatives think him "out of his mind" (Mark 3:21). Jesus' **kinship is with those who do the will of God**, in a new eschatological family, not even with mother, brothers, or sisters by blood ties (Mark 3:31-35; cf Mark 6:1-6). But all too often his own disciples do not understand Jesus (Mark 4:13, 40; 6:52; 8:17-21). The fate of John the Baptist (Mark 6:17-29) hints ominously at Jesus' own passion (Mark 9:13; cf Mark 8:31).

The Mystery Begins to Be Revealed (Mark 8:27-9:32)

A breakthrough seemingly comes with, **Peter's confession** that Jesus is the Christ (Messiah; Mark 8:27-30). But Jesus himself emphasizes his passion (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34), not glory in the kingdom (Mark 10:35-45). Momentarily he is glimpsed in his true identity when he is **transfigured** before three of the disciples (Mark 9:2-8), but by and large Jesus is depicted in Mark as moving obediently along the way to his cross in Jerusalem. Occasionally there are miracles (Mark 9:17-27; 10:46-52; 11:12-14, 20-21, the only such account in Jerusalem), sometimes teachings (Mark 10:2-11, 23-31), but the greatest concern is with **discipleship** (Mark 8:34-9:1; 9:33-50).

The Full Revelation of the Mystery (Mark 9:33-16:8)

The disciples do not grasp the mystery being revealed (Mark 9:32; 10:32, 38). One of them will betray him, Judas (Mark 14:10-11, 43-45); one will deny him, Peter (Mark 14:27, 31, 54, 66-72); all eleven men will desert Jesus (Mark 14:27, 50).

The **passion account**, with its condemnation of Jesus by the Sanhedrin (Mark 14:53, 55-65; 15:1a) and sentencing by **Pilate** (Mark 15:1b-15), is prefaced with the entry into Jerusalem (Mark 11:1-11), ministry and controversies there (Mark 11:15-12:44), Jesus' **Last Supper** with the disciples (Mark 14:1-26), and his arrest at Gethsemane (Mark 14:32-52). A chapter of apocalyptic tone about **the destruction of the temple** (Mark 13:1-2, 14-23) and the coming of the Son of Man (Mark 13:24-27), a discourse filled with promises (Mark 13:11, 31) and admonitions to be watchful (Mark 13:2, 23, 37), is significant for Mark's Gospel, for it helps one see that God, in Jesus, will be victorious after the cross and at the end of history.

The Gospel of Mark ends in the most ancient manuscripts with an abrupt scene at Jesus' tomb, which the women find empty (Mark 16:1-8). His own prophecy of Mark 14:28 is reiterated, that Jesus goes before the disciples into Galilee; "there you will see him." These words may imply resurrection appearances there, or Jesus' parousia there, or the start of Christian mission, or a

return to the roots depicted in Mark 1:9, 14-15 in Galilee. Other hands have attached additional endings after Mark 16:8.

Some Other Notes

The framework of Mark's Gospel is partly geographical: Galilee (Mark 1:14-9:49), through the area "across the Jordan" (Mark 10:1) and through Jericho (Mark 10:46-52), to Jerusalem (Mark 11:1-16:8). Only rarely does Jesus go into Gentile territory (Mark 5:1-20; 7:24-37), but those who acknowledge him there and the centurion who confesses Jesus at the cross (Mark 15:39) presage the gospel's expansion into the world beyond Palestine.

Mark's Gospel is even more oriented to Christology (the study of the meaning and nature of the Messiah). Jesus is the **Son of God** (Mark 1:11; 9:7; 15:39; cf Mark 1:1; 14:61). He is the **Messiah**, the **anointed** king of Davidic descent (Mark 12:35; 15:32), the Greek for which, **Christos**, has, by the time Mark wrote, become in effect a proper name (Mark 1:1; 9:41). Jesus is also seen as **Son of Man**, a term used in Mark not simply as a substitute for "I" or for humanity in general (cf Mark 2:10, 27-28; 14:21) or with reference to a mighty figure who is to come (Mark 13:26; 14:62), but also in connection with Jesus' predestined, necessary path of suffering and vindication (Mark 8:31; 10:45).

The unfolding of Mark's story about Jesus is sometimes viewed by interpreters as centered around the term "**mystery**." The word is employed just once, at Mark 4:11, in the singular, and its content there is the kingdom, the **open secret** that God's reign is now breaking into human life with its reversal of human values. There is a related sense in which Jesus' real identity remained a secret during his lifetime, according to Mark, although demons and demoniacs knew it (Mark 1:24; 3:11; 5:7); Jesus warned against telling of his mighty deeds and revealing his identity (Mark 1:44; 3:12; 5:43; 7:36; 8:26, 30), an injunction sometimes broken (Mark 1:45; cf Mark 5:19-20). Further, Jesus teaches by parables, according to Mark, in such a way that those "outside" the kingdom do not understand, but only those to whom the mystery has been granted by God.

Mark thus shares with Paul, as well as with other parts of the New Testament, an **emphasis on election** (Mark 13:20, 22) and upon the **gospel as Christ and his cross** (cf 1 Cor 1:23). Yet in Mark the person of Jesus is also depicted with an unaffected naturalness. He reacts to events with authentic human emotion: pity (Mark 1:44), anger (Mark 3:5), triumph (Mark 4:40), sympathy (Mark 5:36; 6:34), surprise (Mark 6:9), admiration (Mark 7:29; 10:21), sadness (Mark 14:33-34), and indignation (Mark 14:48-49).

Luke

The Gospel according to Luke is the first part of a two-volume work (Acts of the Apostles being the 2nd part) that continues the biblical history of God's dealings with humanity found in the Old Testament, showing how God's promises to Israel have been fulfilled in Jesus and how the salvation promised to Israel and accomplished by Jesus has been extended to the Gentiles. The stated purpose of the two volumes is to provide Theophilus ("lover of God") and others like him with assurance about earlier instruction they have received (Luke 1:4). To accomplish his purpose, Luke shows that the preaching and teaching of the representatives of the early church are grounded in the preaching and teaching of Jesus, who during his historical ministry (Acts 1:21-22) prepared his specially chosen followers and commissioned them to be witnesses to his resurrection and to all else that he did (Acts 10:37-42). This continuity between the historical

ministry of Jesus and the ministry of the apostles is Luke's way of guaranteeing the fidelity of the Church's teaching to the teaching of Jesus.

The principal divisions of the Gospel according to Luke are the following:

- I. The Prologue (Luke 1:1-4)
- II. The Infancy Narrative (Luke 1:5-2:52)
- III. The Preparation for the Public Ministry (Luke 3:1-4:13)
- IV. The Ministry in Galilee (Luke 4:14-9:50)
- V. The Journey to Jerusalem: Luke's Travel Narrative (Luke 9:51-19:27)
- VI. The Teaching Ministry in Jerusalem (Luke 19:28-21:38)
- VII. The Passion Narrative (Luke 22:1-23:56)
- VIII. The Resurrection Narrative (Luke 24:1-53)

Luke's story of Jesus and the church is dominated by a historical perspective. This history is first of all **salvation history**. God's divine plan for human salvation was accomplished during the period of Jesus, who through the events of his life (Luke 22:22) **fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies** (Luke 4:21; 18:31; 22:37; 24:26-27, 44), and this salvation is now extended to all humanity in the period of the church (Acts 4:12). This salvation history, moreover, is a part of human history. Luke relates the story of Jesus and the church to events in contemporary Palestinian (Luke 1:5; 3:1-2; Acts 4:6) and Roman (Luke 2:1-2; 3:1; Acts 11:28; 18:2, 12) history for, as Paul says in Acts 26:26, "this was not done in a corner." Finally, Luke relates the story of Jesus and the church to contemporaneous church history. Luke is concerned with presenting Christianity as a legitimate form of worship in the Roman world, a religion that is capable of meeting the spiritual needs of a world empire like that of Rome. To this end, Luke depicts the Roman governor Pilate declaring Jesus innocent of any wrongdoing three times (Luke 23:4, 14, 22). At the same time Luke argues in Acts that Christianity is the logical development and proper fulfillment of Judaism and is therefore deserving of the same toleration and freedom traditionally accorded Judaism by Rome (Acts 13:16-41; 23:6-9; 24:10-21; 26:2-23).

The prominence given to the period of the church in the story has important consequences for Luke's interpretation of the teachings of Jesus. By presenting the time of the church as a distinct phase of salvation history, Luke accordingly shifts the early Christian emphasis away from the expectation of an imminent parousia to the day-to-day concerns of the Christian community in the world. He does this in the gospel by regularly emphasizing the words "each day" (Luke 9:23; cf Mark 8:34; Luke 11:3; Luke 16:19; Luke 19:47) in the sayings of Jesus. Although Luke still believes the parousia to be a reality that will come unexpectedly (Luke 12:38, 45-46), he is more concerned with presenting the words and deeds of Jesus as guides for the conduct of Christian disciples in the interim period between the ascension and the parousia and with presenting Jesus himself as the model of Christian life and piety.

Throughout the gospel, Luke calls upon the Christian disciple to identify with the master Jesus, who is **caring and tender toward the poor and lowly, the outcast, the sinner, and the afflicted, toward all those who recognize their dependence on God** (Luke 4:18; 6:20-23; 7:36-50; 14:12-14; 15:1-32; 16:19-31; 18:9-14; 19:1-10; 21:1-4), but who is severe toward the proud and self-righteous, and particularly toward those who place their material wealth before the service of God and his people (Luke 6:24-26; 12:13-21; 16:13-15, 19-31; 18:9-14, 15-25; cf Luke 1:50-53). No gospel writer is more concerned than Luke with the mercy and compassion of

Jesus (Luke 7:41-43; 10:29-37; 13:6-9; 15:11-32). No gospel writer is more concerned with the **role of the Spirit** in the life of Jesus and the Christian disciple (Luke 1:35, 41; 2:25-27; 4:1, 14, 18; 10:21; 11:13; 24:49), with the **importance of prayer** (Luke 3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:28; 11:1-13; 18:1-8), or with **Jesus' concern for women** (Luke 7:11-17, 36-50; 8:2-3; 10:38-42). While Jesus calls all humanity to repent (Luke 5:32; 10:13; 11:32; 13:1-5; 15:7-10; 16:30; 17:3-4; 24:47), he is particularly demanding of **discipleship**. He demands absolute and total detachment from family and material possessions (Luke 9:57-62; 12:32-34; 14:25-35). To all who respond in faith and repentance to the word Jesus preaches, he brings salvation (Luke 2:30-32; 3:6; 7:50; 8:48, 50; 17:19; 19:9) and peace (Luke 2:14; 7:50; 8:48; 19:38, 42) and life (Luke 10:25-28; 18:26-30).

John

The Gospel according to John is quite different in character from the first three gospels (collectively called “the synoptic gospels”). It is highly literary and symbolic. It does not follow the same order or reproduce the same stories as the synoptic gospels. To a much greater degree, it is the product of a developed theological reflection and grows out of a different circle and tradition. It was probably written in the 90s of the first century.

The principal divisions of the Gospel according to John are the following:

- I. Prologue (John 1:1-18)
- II. The Book of Signs (John 1:19-12:50)
- III. The Book of Glory (John 13:1-20:31)
- IV. Epilogue: The Resurrection Appearance in Galilee (John 21:1-25)

The Gospel of John begins with a magnificent **prologue**, which states many of the major themes and motifs of the gospel, much as an overture does for a musical work. The prologue proclaims Jesus as the **preexistent and incarnate Word of God** who has revealed the Father to us. The rest of the first chapter forms the introduction to the gospel proper and consists of the Baptist's testimony about Jesus (there is no baptism of Jesus in this gospel--John simply points him out as the Lamb of God), followed by stories of the call of the first disciples, in which various titles predicated of Jesus in the early church are presented.

The gospel narrative contains a series of “**signs**” – the gospel's word for the wondrous deeds of Jesus. The author is primarily interested in the significance of these deeds, and so interprets them for the reader by various reflections, narratives, and discourses. The first sign is the **transformation of water into wine at Cana** (John 2:1-11); this represents the replacement of the Jewish ceremonial washings and symbolizes the entire creative and transforming work of Jesus. The second sign, the **cure of the royal official's son** (John 4:46-54) simply by the word of Jesus at a distance, signifies the power of Jesus' life-giving word. The same theme is further developed by other signs, probably for a total of seven. The third sign, the **cure of the paralytic** at the pool with five porticoes in ch 5, continues the theme of water offering newness of life. In the preceding chapter, to the woman at the well in Samaria Jesus had offered living water springing up to eternal life, a symbol of the revelation that Jesus brings; here Jesus' life-giving word replaces the water of the pool that failed to bring life. John 6 contains two signs, the **multiplication of loaves** and the **walking on the waters** of the Sea of Galilee. These signs are connected much as the manna and the crossing of the Red Sea are in the Passover narrative and symbolize a new exodus. The multiplication of the loaves is interpreted for the reader by the

discourse that follows, where the bread of life is used first as a figure for the revelation of God in Jesus and then for the Eucharist. After a series of dialogues reflecting Jesus' debates with the Jewish authorities at the Feast of Tabernacles in John 7; 8, the sixth sign is presented in John 9, the sign of the **young man born blind**. This is a narrative illustration of the theme of conflict in the preceding two chapters; it proclaims the triumph of light over darkness, as Jesus is presented as the Light of the world. This is interpreted by a narrative of controversy between the Pharisees and the young man who had been given his sight by Jesus, ending with a discussion of spiritual blindness and spelling out the symbolic meaning of the cure. And finally, the seventh sign, the **raising of Lazarus** in ch 11, is the climax of signs. Lazarus is presented as a token of the real life that Jesus, the Resurrection and the Life, who will now ironically be put to death because of his gift of life to Lazarus, will give to all who believe in him once he has been raised from the dead.

After the account of the seven signs, the "hour" of Jesus arrives, and the author passes from sign to reality, as he moves into the discourses in the upper room that interpret the meaning of the passion, death, and resurrection narratives that follow. The whole gospel of John is a progressive revelation of the glory of God's only Son, who comes to reveal the Father and then returns in glory to the Father. The author's purpose is clearly expressed near the end of gospel: John 20: *"Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of [his] disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written that you may [come to] believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name."*