

## GOSPELS OVERVIEW

**Why are there 4?** Matthew, Mark, Luke and John provide theological interpretations of the most important historical events in the history of the world. Each gospel has its own key distinctives and unique points of emphasis, which are highlighted when comparing them to each other. Then when each individual portrait is studied as one they come together to provide one cohesive, inherent, compelling, masterful, beautiful picture of the life, identity, and work of Jesus Christ.

**Synoptic Gospels:** Matthew, Mark, and Luke are known as the synoptic gospels. The word “synoptic” literally means “to see with one eye.” They are named this way because of the significant overlap in content. Over 97% of Mark’s content is also in Matthew, and a significant portion of Mark is in Luke as well. While 90% of John’s content is unique to John.

**How to Read the Gospels:** The gospels are the climax of the best story ever told. They should be read and studied by every Christian for as long as he or she lives, for the beauty and the glory of what they communicate and how they fit together will never be exhausted. With that said, every reader should ask 2 questions of every section: (1) What is the author trying to communicate about who Jesus is? Every single passage is intentionally chosen to reveal the glory of the God Man. (2) Why did the author place this passage in the order that he did? The order of each section is generally chronological, but it is ALWAYS theological. For example, Mark includes a story of Jesus healing a blind man (Mark 8:22-26) right before Peter confesses that He is the Son of God (8:27-30). Do you see the connection? Many people could not “see” who Jesus truly was. But just like Jesus opened the physical eyes of the blind man, the Spirit opened the spiritually blind eyes of Peter. Peter once was blind but now he sees. The first miracle points to the second!

## MATTHEW

**Key Distinctives:** Jewish Audience: The gospel according to Matthew was written by a Jew to a Jewish audience in order to show that Jesus is the long awaited Messiah and the fulfillment of the Old Testament. He begins his gospel with a genealogy that highlights the lines of Abraham and David in order to show that Jesus is the promised offspring who will bring blessing to the nations and the promised Son of David who will sit on his throne forever and ever. Matthew goes on to quote the OT 45 times, therefore providing a significant bridge from the OT to the New.

The Identity of Christ: While other gospels focus on Jesus’ identity as the Savior of the world, Matthew’s Jewish audience leads him to focus on the fact that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of David, the New Moses, and Immanuel.

Discourse: Matthew’s emphasis on Jesus being the New Moses leads him to include 5 lengthy sermons, with the major focus being the Kingdom of Heaven (AKA the Kingdom of God. Matthew’s Jewish audience was reluctant to use God’s name).

## MARK

**Key Distinctives:** Narrative: In contrast to Matthew, Mark focuses on narrative, not discourse. Mark aims to reveal the identity of Jesus by showing what He did over against what He said. The narrative moves very quickly (“immediately” 45x), so it reads like a series of snapshots.

Miracles: Mark’s emphasis on Jesus’ actions results in over a third of his book consisting of miracle accounts. The purpose of these accounts is to inspire faith in Christ, who Mark is presenting as the Son of God (thus high Christology is a key distinctive of Mark, specifically the cross of Christ. For if He can walk on water and raise the dead, surely the resurrection is true).

Discipleship: Mark focuses on Jesus’ actions because he wants his readers to not merely know what Jesus taught, he wants them to live like Jesus lived. Anyone can acquire knowledge, but it is hard to follow Jesus. Mark’s aim is to compel people to follow Christ, for He is worthy.

## LUKE

**Key Distinctives:** Salvation and Outcasts: Luke used the verb “to save” more than any other gospel. He went to great lengths to communicate that anyone can be saved, no matter who they are or what they have done. Tax collectors, prostitutes, and sinners can be saved because Jesus came to save the sick, not the healthy. This emphasis leads Luke to include 17 stories about women (13 of them unique to his gospel) in order to show that women are welcome in the Kingdom (women were not allowed to be disciples of Rabbis at the time). Luke himself was a gentile outcast, which certainly contributed to his emphasis on the fact that anyone can be saved.

Prayer and the Role of the Holy Spirit: At every important event of Jesus’ life Luke records that Jesus was praying. Closely related to this is Luke’s emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit. These themes continue in the book of Acts as they are both mentioned in just about every chapter.

## JOHN

**Key Distinctives:** 7 Signs: John’s purpose for writing was to convince readers that Jesus is the Son of God (20:31). Therefore he records 7 spectacular miracles that serve as “signs” to point to Jesus’ true identity. These signs include Jesus: turning 175 gallons of water into wine (2), healing a boy on his deathbed without even seeing him (4), healing a man who had not walked in 38 years (5), feeding 15,000+ people (6), walking on water (6), healing a blind man (9), and resurrecting a man who had been dead for 4 days (11). Each sign has special theological significance, and the overall point is to lead readers to conclude “Surely Jesus is the Son of God.”

7 “I AM” Statements: John records Jesus making 7 explicit claims to deity by stating “I AM... the bread of life (6:35), the light of the world (8:12), the gate for the sheep (10:7), the Good Shepherd (10:11), the resurrection (11:25), the way, the truth, and the life (14:6), and the true vine (15:1).”

The Upper Room Discourse: John 13-17 records Jesus’ last words to His disciples the night before He was crucified. This entire section is unique to John, but it includes some of the most precious passages in the Bible (such as teaching on the Holy Spirit, abiding, and the high priestly prayer).