

2 Major Questions about the Gospels

1. Why do we only have FOUR gospels in our Bibles?

The media often talks about *the lost books of the Bible*. Seven of these books claim to be other gospels.

There is the gospel of Andrew
Bartholomew
Barnabas
Matthias
Thomas
Peter
Philip

Not one of these seven is in our Bibles. Why? **Should** they have been included?
The simple answer is *no*. This is the reason.

Our New Testament is a collection of 27 books that had been written by 100 AD. But not **all** of these books were accepted as God-given in 100 AD. However 50 years later, in 150 AD - Christian communities scattered thruout the Roman empire, along with their leaders had agreed on 20 of them. They included the 4 gospels we have in our Bibles and the letters of Paul. Because Christians believed they were **God-given**, they were called *Scripture* - meaning *sacred writings*.

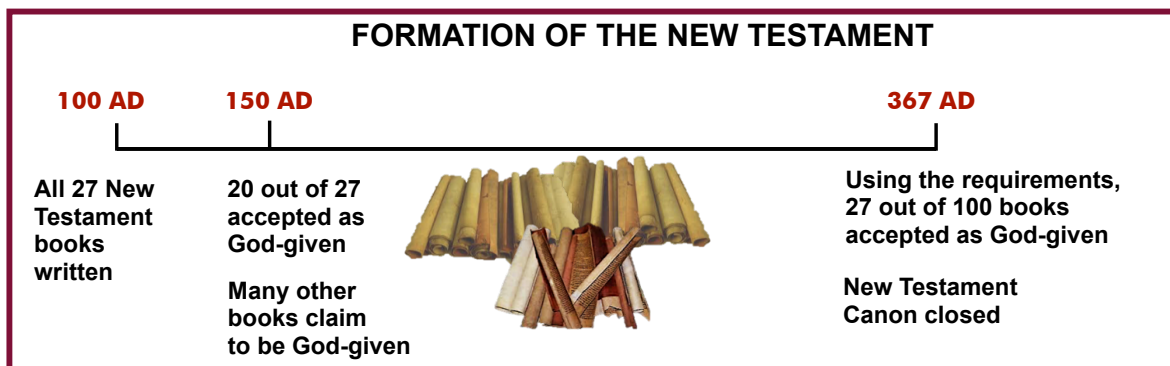
About this same time, 150 AD, false prophets began teaching lies about Jesus. Some said He was not deity. Others said He was not really human; He was only a spirit being. He did miracles just for His own benefit. He did not really die on the cross. He did not physically rise from the dead. Then books appeared to support these teachings. Seven claimed to be gospels written by people of the first century.

All the Christian communities knew immediately they were counterfeit. They assumed they would disappear on their own because no one would believe them. But instead, over the next 200 years, there was more false teaching, along with more and more counterfeit books. So major leaders of local churches from east to west had a series of meetings. They needed to clarify and finalize which books should be part of the New Testament and which should be left out. To guide their decisions, they developed 3 requirements.

To be considered God-given and part of the New Testament, every book...

- ...had to be connected to people who had seen Jesus after His resurrection.
- ...had to be accepted as authoritative by Christian communities at the end of the 1st century.
- ...had to agree with the teaching about Jesus in the 4 accepted gospels and the writings of Paul.

Using these guidelines, over a period of several years, leaders and laity looked at every book that claimed to be of God. By then, there were some 100 making that claim. By 367 AD, the 27 books that we have in our New Testament, were the books that were accepted. The New Testament Canon (group) was now considered complete and no further books could be added. All the other books were rejected, including the 7 that claimed to be additional gospels. They were rejected because their teaching about Jesus was heresy.



For the next 1500 years - from 400 AD until the 1900's, everyone agreed that only these 27 books met the requirements to be part of the New Testament. However since the 1940's, false prophets have once again started teaching lies about Jesus - about His birth, miracles, character, death and resurrection. To support their teaching, they have gone back to these counterfeit books, the so-called "lost" gospels. But the reality is, they were never lost nor forgotten. The writings of the early church fathers clearly explain what they taught and why they were rejected. So the next time you hear someone talking about these other gospels and asking why they are not in our Bibles, remember the facts. We have only four because only they met the requirements of being Scripture - being God-given. The others were left out because their teaching about Jesus was false.

2. Why do we have FOUR – why not just 1 gospel that combines the details?

It is obvious there are differences between the 4 books. Some facts and stories are in one gospel but not in the other three. Since they are all about the life of Jesus, why not have just one gospel that combines the details and puts them in chronological order? It certainly would make it easier to read.

The reason is that each of the authors wants to present Jesus to a specific group of people from a viewpoint the group can relate to. Let's see how the authors do it.

MATTHEW

The Jews as a people and nation had been waiting and looking for their Messiah-king for many years. Their Old Testament Scriptures had told them exactly what to look for. So **Matthew** writes his gospel to the **Jews** saying, *Jesus is your Messiah-King - the One you have been waiting for.*

As evidence, he uses...

- The genealogy and early years of Jesus
- Quotations from the Old Testament
- Teachings of Jesus
- Ending of book

Genealogy.

The Jews knew their King had to be from the line of both Abraham and David. So Matthew starts in the very first sentence of his book – Chapter 1:1 - by saying, *A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.* The word *son* means descendent. He then continues with the genealogy of Jesus thru the family line of Joseph. He knows that Joseph was not the biological father. In the following verses, Matthew explains that Jesus was born of a virgin..

But Matthew also knows Jewish law - the **legal** right to kingship and the throne of David comes thru the **legal** father. He knows that Joseph had become Jesus' legal father thru adoption. It is why he gives this family line. If it had no value, Matthew would not have emphasized it by starting out, *here is the record - here is the proof to show that Jesus is connected to Abraham and David thru Joseph's family.*

Early years

Matthew uses the **early years** of Jesus to show Him as Messiah-**King**. In chapter 2:1, he writes about the Magi. These are men of importance, who travel 600 miles from Babylon to Jerusalem in order to worship Jesus. They bring gifts that were only given to kings - gold, frankincense, and myrrh. When they arrive in Jerusalem, they ask, *Where is He that is born KING of the Jews?* Matthew mentions the Magi, but leaves out the story of the shepherd, because they do not point to Jesus' royalty.

Quotations

Matthew uses **quotations** from the Old Testament to prove that Jesus is the promised Messiah-King. In chapter 2:17 he quotes from the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah. In 4:14 he quotes from the prophet Isaiah. Twelve times, when talking about Jesus, he says, *that it might be fulfilled.* Matthew is saying to the Jews, *Remember what our Old Testament said about the Messiah? It has been fulfilled in Jesus. Here's His biography to prove it.*

In addition, 129 times he either quotes from or refers to the Old Testament. This is why Matthew is the first gospel in the New Testament. More than any other book, it ties the Old and New Testament together.

Teachings

Matthew uses some of the **teachings** of Jesus to show His Kingship.

Three chapters are the Sermon on the Mount, when Jesus tells the people,

Your religious leaders have made up their own interpretation of the Old Testament. - You have heard it said. - But I say - I have authority to tell you, this is what your Old Testament really means.

Jesus as King is qualified to explain what God says and what God requires.

Later in Matthew's book there are 2 chapters of Jesus' teaching from the Mt. of Olives. He explains what will happen just before He comes as King to establish His physical kingdom.

Ending of book

Matthew emphasizes Jesus as King in the way he **ends** the book. Jesus tells the apostles after the resurrection, **All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me.** Matthew 28:18.

Only a divine **king** could say, *I have complete authority - complete power not only in heaven but also on earth.*

In his biography, Matthew's goal is to only write about things that emphasize Jesus as Messiah - King. He uses genealogy, early years of Jesus, Old Testament quotations, teachings and final words of Jesus.

MARK

Mark writes his book for the **Romans** - citizens of the great Roman empire. They had thousands upon thousands of servants from the nations they conquered. In the first century, Romans were always looking for servants capable of doing a good day's work.

Mark tells them, **Jesus is the Ideal Servant.**

He develops this concept thru...

Content

Use of the Greek language

Ending of book

Content - what he chooses to include and exclude in his gospel.

In chapter one, there is no genealogy; there is nothing about Jesus' early years. Mark knows about them, but does not include them because the family line and birth of a servant are not important. When talking about a servant, the only question is, what can he **do**?

So Mark begins his biography telling what **Jesus** can do.

Chapter one, verse 23 says there is a man in the synagogue with an evil or unclean spirit. According to verse 25, Jesus rebukes the spirit saying, *be quiet. Come out of him.* The man is healed. Then Jesus leaves the synagogue and goes to the house of Simon and Andrew.

Verse 30 tells us Jesus heals Peter's mother in law who has a fever.

In verse 34, *Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons....*

Verse 40 - Jesus heals a man with leprosy

In chapter 2 he heals a paralyzed man. In chapter 3 a man with a deformed hand is healed.

Mark knows the Roman people are not interested in what a servant says, but in what he does. So he describes at least one miracle per chapter thru chapter 11. In total there are 18 miracles, but only 4 parables. Mark does this to emphasize - not what Jesus says, but what He does.

Use of the Greek language

Mark presents Jesus as the Ideal Servant by the way he uses the Greek language.

He repeats the Greek word **εὐθὺς** 42 times. It means *immediately*. He uses this word to show continuous action.

In chapter one, Mark repeats this word 11 times. All of our translations have left it out at least once. But in the Greek, Mark uses the word *euthus* in...

Verse 10 *immediately, Jesus, going up out of the water...*

Verse 12 *immediately the Spirit drove Him...*

Verse 18 *immediately leaving their nets...*

Verse 20 *immediately He called them...*

In the original Greek this word *euthus* is also found in verses 21, 23, 28, 29, 30, 42 and 43. Mark uses this word to show continuous action.

Because he uses the word so often, our English translations have either left it out or have used other words in its place. Besides *immediately*, words such as *no sooner than*, *at that point*, *as soon as*, *at once*, *quickly*, *as*, *just then* ... all these phrases have been used to translate the one Greek word *εὐθὺς*.

In addition, Mark uses the word **and** to begin 12 out of his 16 chapters. Our English translations have removed some of them in order to give a smoother reading. This does not mean Mark is a bad writer. He starts every chapter with *and* in order to tie the chapters together. Someone has said, *the narrative almost runs*. Another writer says John's biography is like a still picture; Matthew and Luke's biographies are like colored slides. Mark's biography is like a video. There is constant movement and action.

Mark also uses the **present tense** in his verbs.

Our English Bibles say, *Jesus went, He said, He was* - past tense. But in the original Greek, Mark writes, *Jesus goes, He says, He is, He leaves....* Everything is in the present tense, so that it is more vivid and alive.

Ending of book

*Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere and the Lord **worked** with them and confirmed His word by the **signs** that accompanied it.* Mark 16:20

Mark ends his biography with a picture of Jesus, not as King with authority, but as the ideal Servant still working.

Mark's biography is for the Romans, to present Jesus in such a way it will catch their attention and they will want to know even more about Him. To present Jesus as the ideal Servant, Mark gives no genealogy or nativity story, he describes 18 miracles and uses the Greek language to show constant action. He ends with Jesus continuing to work. His final purpose is to lead the Romans to faith in Jesus as Savior.

LUKE

Luke writes his biography for the **Greeks** of that day. They wrote about the ideal man and used the Olympic games to find him.

So Luke presents **Jesus** as the ideal Man.

He develops this, based on what the Greeks want to know about the ideal man.

Descended from the gods

Important details about the mother

Details about his early life, being available to the common person

Sound body and mind

Great teacher with concern for the person as an individual

Descended from the gods

The Greeks believed the ideal man would be descended from the gods. So notice how Luke closes the genealogy of Jesus.

*The son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, **the son of God.*** Luke 3:38

Important details about the mother

The Greeks said it would be important to know about the **mother** of the ideal man. So Luke gives details about Mary, the biological mother of Jesus. He gives her family line, her experiences, her thinking and even some of her exact words.

Details about his early life, being available to the common person

The Greeks said there should be details about the early life of the ideal man. So Luke tells about the journey of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem and the actual story of Jesus' birth. Only Luke mentions His naming, circumcision, dedication and trip to Egypt.

The Greeks believed the ideal man would be available to the common people. So when Luke tells about these early years, he leaves out the story of the wise men because they were men of great importance. Instead he tells about the shepherds, Anna and Simeon - some of the common people.

Sound body and mind

The Greeks said the ideal man would have a sound body and a great mind.

It is why Luke tells about Jesus at the age of 12, when He went with His parents to Jerusalem to learn how to celebrate Passover. At the temple seminar, Jesus showed His wisdom in asking and answering questions of the religious leaders.

Luke summarizes this period in Luke 2:52.

Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man. In presenting Jesus as the ideal man, Luke shows that in His humanity, He developed mentally, physically, spiritually and socially, the areas important to the Greeks. In other words, he shows that Jesus was complete and well-balanced in His development.

Great teacher with concern for the person as an individual

Six hundred years before Jesus, there was a famous Greek man named Aesop. He wrote stories that always had a lesson to them. They became known as *Aesop's Fables*. The Greeks believed a person had great wisdom when they could use stories and parables as their method of teaching. They said the ideal man would not only be a great teacher but would also show care and concern about people as individuals. This is why Luke, wanting to show these qualities in Jesus, gives the teaching of Jesus, using 19 of His **parables**. Many are found only in his gospel - the good Samaritan, the prodigal son, the Pharisee and tax collector. In all of these, plus the real life story of Zacchaeus we see Jesus cares about people as individuals.

Thruout his gospel, Luke presents Jesus as the ideal man. He knows and believes Jesus is more than just a man. But he also knows that with their great civilization, the Greeks have no reason to consider an obscure Jewish prophet born in the land of Israel. However, if they see He **is** the ideal man, they will be attracted to Jesus. As they learn more about Him, they will realize He is also deity and can be their Savior.



God the Father is spirit and no one on earth has seen Him. John explains that Jesus came to reveal the Father - to demonstrate what the Father is like.

John writes his gospel for everyone.

He presents Jesus as deity.

He provides evidence, with ...
His beginning statements
7 people who declare Jesus' deity
7 miracles to demonstrate His deity
Jesus as the Yahweh of the Old Testament
His ending statement

His beginning statements

John says Jesus is deity who came to this earth with a visible body.

As deity, Jesus is eternal. This is why John does not mention any genealogy or anything about birth of Jesus. In the very first sentence of the gospel John says, *In the beginning - in eternity past...* Jesus' life did not start with His human birth; He existed from the beginning. Jesus is deity.

7 declarations of His deity

John tells about 7 people who declare Jesus is deity. One of them was the apostle Thomas, the doubter. When he saw Jesus after the resurrection, he worshipped Him saying, *My Lord and My God*.

7 miracles to demonstrate His deity John 20:31

Changing water into wine – John 2
Healing the son of a government official – John 4
Healing a man unable to walk – Jn. 5
Feeding the 5 thousand – Jn. 6
Walking on the water – Jn. 6
Healing a man born blind – Jn. 9
Raising Lazarus from the dead – Jn. 11

Jesus as the Yahweh of the Old Testament

In the Old Testament book of Exodus, God told Moses he was to go and talk with Pharaoh, king of Egypt. Moses asked God, *Whom should I say sent me? What is His name?*

God replied, *tell Pharaoh "I AM" has sent you.* The Hebrew letters for *I AM*, form the name YHWH - Yahweh. Thru the changes in various languages - Hebrew, Greek, Latin, German and finally English - this name for deity is translated in our Bibles as *Yahweh*, *Jehovah*, or *LORD*, written in capital letters. John says Jesus used **this** name of deity for Himself.

To prove it, he gives the statements of Jesus...

I, I AM the Bread of Life; I, I AM the Door, the Vine, the Good Shepherd, the Way, Truth and Life, the Resurrection.

John tells about the time Jesus was talking with the Jewish religious leaders. He told them, *before Abraham was, I AM.* They knew immediately what He meant. They say, *He is claiming to be God. This is blasphemy.*

Then John tells about Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Over 400 Roman soldiers came and said they were looking for *Jesus of Nazareth*. In the original Greek, Jesus replied, *I, I AM.* Instantly the soldiers fall backwards to the ground. The "I am" statements are evidence of Jesus' deity and power.

John's ending statement

*But these are written that you may believe that Jesus **IS** the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God and that believing, you may have life in His name.* John 20:31 John is talking about eternal life. Jesus can offer us and give us eternal life because **He** is eternal - He is deity.

To paraphrase J. Sidlow Baxter, John is declaring the world's Savior is also the world's maker. The historical Jesus is not just man, but is also the eternal Son. Jesus can teach truth because He is truth. He can give life, because He is life. In his gospel, John is saying Jesus is deity come to this earth in human form.

All 4 gospels tell about Jesus, but each presents Him in a different way to a different group.

The authors themselves come from different backgrounds.

Matthew Levi was Jewish, a tax collector and one of the 12 apostles.

- **Date:** written c. 60 AD from either Jerusalem or Antioch of Syria.
- **Style:** typically Jewish - he groups the chapters by topic.
 - The teachings of the King
 - The miracles of the King
 - The Jews' reactions to their king
 - Events before the coming of the King
- **Theme:** Jesus as Messiah-KING.

Mark was John Mark. He was Jewish and a cousin to Barnabas. He became a believer thru Peter. 1 Pet. 5:13

He was Peter's secretary

- **Date:** written c. 60-70 AD from Rome.
 - Mark learned the details of what Jesus did from Peter. The Holy Spirit guided him in the accuracy of what he wrote. The Holy Spirit also guided him in what to include and what to leave out.
- **Style:** concise, vivid, picturesque, active; explains Jewish customs.
 - The Romans were not interested in philosophical reasoning. They liked action, so Mark gives them action. He gives them a book that is brief and to the point. It is very western in style and the way we think. If a person has never read the Bible, Mark gives them the most facts in the shortest amount of time. And because it is so action packed, it will hold their attention.
- **Theme:** Jesus as the ideal SERVANT.

Luke was Greek - a medical doctor, historian, pastor and companion to Paul.

Luke was not an apostle. In fact, he never saw Jesus or was in Israel when Jesus was there. This means he was not an eyewitness of the resurrected Jesus. But he was an historian. When Paul was in prison in Caesarea for 2 years in the mid-50's, Luke was nearby as his doctor.

During those years, Luke interviewed many of the people in Galilee and Judea who had been eye-witnesses. Luke spent the most time with Mary, the mother of Jesus. She told him details no one else had known. After comparing the eye-witness accounts and checking them out, he then wrote them down.

- **Date:** written c. 60 AD from Caesarea to Theophilus, an important Greek man.
 - He is a believer, who has questions about Jesus. He wants to know which stories about Jesus are fact and which are fiction. Luke's purpose is to confirm the faith of this Greek man and thru it to appeal to Greeks in general.
- **Style:** historical narrative beginning with a dedication in classical Greek.
 - The rest of the book is in common or koiné Greek. He puts events in chronological order.
 - Knowing Greeks loved poetry, he included the poetry of the angel at Jesus' birth, the poetry of Zechariah and Elizabeth, the song of Mary that we know it as the Magnificat.
 - Thruout the book he uses the language of a doctor. When talking about a fever, he says it is a *high* fever. When describing the miracle of a lame man, he says, *his ankle bones were strengthened*. These are words of a doctor.
- **Theme:** Jesus as the ideal MAN.

John was Jewish, a fisherman, one of the 12 apostles and later a pastor.

- **Date:** written c. 90 AD, while serving as pastor in Ephesus, in western Turkey.
 - This is some 30 years after the other gospels were written.
- **Style:** John gives more explanations and reveals more personal things about Jesus.
 - Altho his style is the most simple of the 4, his content is the most difficult to understand.
- **Theme:** Jesus as DEITY came in human form; He is the eternal Son of God.

So we have 4 authors, each writing a biography of Jesus to a different group of people. Each chooses only those things that will fit his audience. To once again paraphrase J. Sidlow Baxter,

Matthewthe Promised One is here; see His credentials
Markthis is how He worked; see His power
Lukethis is what He was like; see His nature
Johnthis is who He really was; see His Deity

(J. Sidlow Baxter, *Explore the Book*, vol. 5, p. 312)

We have compared the 4 gospels, but what does it have to do with our lives? I think there are 2 things we can learn.

First of all, none of the writers considered there was just one way to present Jesus. They thought about the people they would talk to - what **their** interests were. Then they let the Holy Spirit guide them to present the facts about Jesus that were best suited to those people.

We need to stop and listen to what people are saying or asking. If people express interest in Jesus or in spiritual things, we need to start where they are. We use the facts that we know about Jesus that are relevant for the person at the moment. Once a person is interested and wants to learn more, then we help him / her to see the complete picture of Jesus - He is deity, Savior and Lord.

A second lesson is that each gospel writer used his own natural style. He did not try to copy the others.

God wants to use us in our natural style. Some of us are quiet and hesitant; others are bold and direct. To those who need a bold and direct approach about Jesus, He will send a bold person. But for the one who needs a quiet, soft approach, He will send the quiet person. Never try to be like anyone else. Be yourself because God needs all kinds of people. God will always match you with the right person for the right situation.

EXTRA INFORMATION FOR THE STUDIOUS AND INQUISITIVE

CHERUBIM (angelic beings) represent God's presence in Scripture

They are pictured with different forms or faces to symbolize different aspects of God.

There is the **LION**, **OX**, **MAN**, **EAGLE** - Ezekiel 1:5-10; Revelation 4:6-7; Revelation 5:6

THE GOSPEL WRITERS each choose one of these pictures to develop a specific aspect of Jesus

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------|
| • Matthew writes to the Jews | he pictures Jesus as King | symbol of lion |
| • Mark writes to the Romans | he pictures Jesus as Servant | symbol of ox |
| • Luke writes to the Greeks | he pictures Jesus as Man | symbol of man |
| • John writes to everyone | he pictures Jesus as Deity | symbol of eagle |