

# *The Gospel Journey*



## *Examining the Distinctiveness of the Four Gospels*

*A Self Study Guide*

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# *The Distinctiveness of the Four Gospels*

None of the gospel writers had the simple purpose of just writing about what Jesus did. Each writer records certain events and teachings of Jesus to reveal something about Jesus or teach a particular attribute about Jesus. Therefore, an effort to reconcile the gospels misses the whole point of God giving humanity four distinct gospels. **The gospels were not intended to be harmonized.** Each gospel should be studied in effort to see what the purposes and arguments of the writer were about Jesus. We must also remember that the writers were not taking a pad and paper with them and writing down the things they thought were interesting about Jesus. The gospels were penned after Jesus died and the authors did not write on their own volition. Peter reminds us in 2 Peter 1:21 that the authors were carried along by the Holy Spirit when they wrote these words. Therefore, we need to examine each gospel to discover the message of the Holy Spirit to the world concerning the Savior.

To find out the purpose of this gospel, we need to look at the structure of the gospel. We need to consider how the gospel begins, if there are any repeated themes and key words, and who is the intended audience.

## *Matthew*

### **Jesus' Genealogy (1:1-17)**

The gospel written by Matthew begins with a genealogical account for Jesus. Read the genealogy and answer the following questions.

1. Explain why Matthew emphasizes Jesus as the "Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham."
  - What clues does this beginning to Matthew's gospel give us in determining Matthew's intended audience?
  - Write down what was promised to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3) and to David (2 Samuel 7: 12-13).

2. List the four women that are mentioned in the genealogy. Women were not typically listed in a genealogy. Why does Matthew place these four women in Jesus' genealogical record?

-- The mention of these women is especially curious considering each of their backgrounds. What do we know about each of these women?

### **Key Phrases:**

Surveying a book also requires looking for key phrases and key themes. Look at the following passages and write down the key word or phrases.

Matthew 1:22; 2:17; 12:17

-- Why does Matthew repeat this phrase? What does this tell us about this gospel's intended audience?

Matthew 3:2; 4:17; 5:3; 7:21

-- Matthew is the only writer to use this phrase in all of the scriptures. Do some research and attempt to understand the meaning of this phrase. Write down your findings below.

### **Final Notes:**

Read through the gospel, in an effort to simply survey the book, and write down characteristics you see in this gospel (i.e. lots of teachings, or lots of miracles, or lots of parables, etc). Use the headings in your Bible for clues.

# Mark

Let us begin our study of Mark by trying to determine the audience. There are many unique characteristics to Mark's gospel that will help us understand Mark's purpose for writing this gospel.

## Unique Characteristics:

1. Read Mark 7:3; 14:12; and 15:42. Write down what you see Mark doing in these verses. What is Mark explaining? What does this tell us about the intended audience of this gospel?
2. Read the following passages in Mark (3:17; 5:41; 7:11, 34; 9:43; 10:46; 14:36; 15:22, 34). What is Mark explaining? What does this tell us about the intended audience of this gospel?
3. The Jews used a system of time that included three watches of the night. Read the following passages to determine how many watches are there in Mark's gospel (6:48; 13:35). What does this tell us about the intended audience?
4. You may need a little help for this question. Look at the following scriptures and determine what is unique about the words Mark uses (5:9; 6:27; 12:15; 12:42; 15:15; 15:16; 15:39). Perhaps the margins in your Bible, commentaries, or Bible dictionaries will be useful for this.
5. Based upon your above answers, who was this gospel written to?

Read Mark 1:1-8

6. Compare Matthew's genealogical record to Mark's. What differences do you notice?

-- How do these differences go about showing the unique purpose of Matthew's gospel and Mark's gospel?

**Background Information:**

The Roman emperors assigned themselves the title "the Son of God." The common and official title of Augustus Caesar in Greek documents was "Emperor Caesar Augustus, son of god." An inscription from Pergamum refers to Augustus as "The Emperor Caesar, son of god, Augustus, ruler of all land and sea."

7. What exactly was Mark trying to prove Jesus to be, considering the audience this gospel was written to?

**Key Word:**

Read the following passages (with a New American Standard Version, if possible) and write down the repeated key word (1:10, 12, 18, 20, 21, 28, 29, 30, 42, 43):

**Final Notes:**

Read through the gospel, in an effort to simply survey the book, and write down characteristics you see in this gospel (i.e. lots of teachings, or lots of miracles, or lots of parables, etc). Use the headings in your Bible for clues.

# Luke

Let us start our study of Luke by getting to know the author. The scriptures give us information about him that will help us understand his audience and purpose.

## Luke, the Man

1. Read Colossians 4:10-14. What do we learn about Luke in this scripture? Write down TWO unique things we learn about Luke from Paul's writing to the Colossians.

## Unique Characteristics:

2. Compare the following scriptures, one from Luke's gospel and one from Mark's gospel:  
**"And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left" (Luke 23:33; NKJV).**

**"And they brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a Skull" (Mark 15:22; NKJV).**

-- What language is the word "Calvary" transliterated from? What language is "Golgotha" transliterated from? What does this tell us about the intended audience of Luke's gospel?

## No Jewish language

Even though Mark was written to the Romans, there are words that are Jewish which Mark retains. Three words to notice are: "abba," "rabbi," and "hosanna." Mark's gospel has these terms, but Luke's gospel does not.

## Old Testament quotes from Septuagint

When Luke quotes from the Old Testament, he quotes from the Septuagint. The Septuagint is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament.

3. Read Luke 18:9-14. How does Luke portray the tax collector? What did the Jews think of tax collectors? How is Luke portraying Jesus by telling this story?

**Purpose:**

4. Read Luke 1:1-4. What is Luke's stated purpose for writing this gospel? Who is Luke writing this gospel to specifically?

-- How does Luke 2:1-2 and Luke 3:1-2 prove your answer?

**Key Word:**

Read the following passages to determine another emphasis of Luke (9:51-53; 13:22, 13:33-34, 17:11, 18:31, 19:11, 19:28, and 19:33). Why would Luke emphasize this?

5. Compare Luke's genealogy (3:23-38) to Matthew and Mark's genealogical accounts. Why are they different?

**Final Notes:**

Read through the gospel, in an effort to simply survey the book, and write down characteristics you see in this gospel (i.e. lots of teachings, or lots of miracles, or lots of parables, etc). Use the headings in your Bible for clues.

# *John*

1. Read some introductions by commentators and scholars about this gospel. Many will write that John is a supplement to the other gospel accounts. What, if any, is the problem with considering John's purpose to be one of simply adding more information about Jesus' life that had not been previously written?

## **Purpose:**

2. Read John 20:30-31. What is John's stated purpose for writing this gospel?

-- Is this purpose a duplication or conflict with the purpose of Mark's gospel? Explain.

3. Read John 1:1-3. What is Jesus' genealogy, according to John?

-- Compare John 1:1-13 with Genesis 1:1-5. What similarities do you see?

-- What do we learn about how John is going to prove his purpose in this gospel?

-- What do we learn about the intended audience of this gospel? (see also John 3:23-24)



**Key Signs:**

Write down the seven signs that John records which are used to prove that Jesus is the Son of God.

4. John gives unique information to use concerning Jesus after the resurrection. What events does John record that are not found in the gospels? How do these events go about proving Jesus to be the Son of God?

**Final Notes:**

Read through the gospel, in an effort to simply survey the book, and write down characteristics you see in this gospel (i.e. lots of teachings, or lots of miracles, or lots of parables, etc). Use the headings in your Bible for clues.

**Conclusion:**

5. Why do you think we were given four gospels instead of one?
6. Why do you think the four gospels contain differences in their accounts?
7. Do you think the gospel's were intended to be harmonized?