

Intro to THE GOSPELS, pt. I

Between the Testaments: Just a reminder and a recap of the history of Israel that we just covered in the OT... After Moses led the people out of Egypt and Joshua led them into the promised land, the beginnings of the nation of Israel were tumultuous, as they engaged in one battle after the other to possess the land. Once settled, the nation took on a form of government that revolved around specific judges. Before long, they wanted to be governed by a King, so there were three kings who governed while the kingdom was united: Saul, David, and Solomon. When the kingdom became divided, Jeroboam ruled Israel to the North, and Rehoboam ruled Judah to the South. Both regions had their share of good kings and bad kings. Eventually, Israel would be taken captive by the Assyrians, and Judah would be taken captive by the Babylonians. After the collapse of the Assyrians, both would be held by the Babylonians. The Babylonians would be taken over by the Medes and the Persians, and under their reign, the exiles would be permitted to go back to their homeland.

It is here that the temple and the city walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt under Ezra and Nehemiah. The last book of the OT, Malachi, calls the nation to repentance after the temple was rebuilt.

The period of time between the testaments (about 400 years) saw the nation of Israel undergo many changes. In 334 B.C., Alexander the Great set out to conquer the East. In 331, he conquered the capitals of the Persian Empire, and also took Palestine and Syria. During Greek rule, Israel became divided, not geographically, but philosophically. The more conservative believers who remained strong to their Jewish roots became the Hasidic Jews. The more progressive believers, the Hellenists, sought to maintain their belief system while also keeping a close alliance with the politicians. Both became so devoted to their political positions that they lost sight of the fundamental tenets of their Hebrew faith. The Hassidics became known as the Pharisees, and the Hellenists became known as the Sadducees. By the time we get to the New Testament, the Roman Empire had taken Alexander the Great and the Greeks, and the Sanhedrin, made up of both Pharisees and Sadducees, was the supreme council and tribunal of the Jews, headed by the High Priest, and having religious, civil, and criminal jurisdiction, while being loyal and accountable to the Caesar in Rome.

Intro to the NEW TESTAMENT

The New Testament contains 27 books written by nine different authors over about 50 years' time. The books are divided into five sections:

- (1) **The Four Gospels.** These describe the life and the ministry of Jesus Christ. Although they were written later than many other books of the NT, it was only natural that, in the order of placing the books, they were given a priority position since they accounted for Jesus' life and ministry.
- (2) **The Book of Acts.** This is the history of the beginnings of the church and the initial spread of Christianity throughout the Greco-Roman world.
- (3) **The Pauline Epistles.** From Romans to Philemon, these were letters written by the Apostle Paul
- (4) **The General Epistles.** From Hebrews to Jude, these were letters written by other authors.
- (5) **The Revelation.** This last book of the Bible describes the ultimate triumph of Jesus Christ and His people in the future.

The message of the New Testament centers around the Person (Jesus Christ) who gave Himself for the remission of sins, and the People (the Church) who have received His salvation. The central theme of the New Testament is Salvation. The Gospels introduce the Saviour, the Acts of the Apostles describe the spread of the Saviour's Gospel, the Epistles give details and instructions concerning the blessings of that salvation, and The Revelation previews the ultimate consummation of that salvation.

Probably the earliest book that was written was the book of James, written in 45AD, and the last would be the book of Revelation, itself, written around 90 A.D.

Synoptic Gospels

Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called the “Synoptic” Gospels, because they include many of the same stories, often in the same sequence, and sometime the same wording. Most scholars believe that these Gospels share the same point of view and are clearly linked. The Gospel of John differs in style from the other three, and is organized into much longer discourses. The differences in the four Gospels supplement each other without contradiction and the similarities compliment each other. The result is a comprehensive fourfold record of the ministry of Jesus Christ.

The Gospel of Matthew

Each Gospel is unique, in that, while inspired by God, each has a style and a theme unique to its individual writer.

The writer of the first gospel is **Matthew**, who we know as one of the disciples of Jesus Christ. When Jesus first called Matthew as an apostle, he was a tax collector. In those days, tax collectors were despised individuals, because they collaborated with the Romans to extract taxes from the Jewish citizens.

But being a tax collector was of great benefit to Matthew as one of the Gospel writers. Tax collectors were expected to be able to write in a form of shorthand, which essentially meant that Matthew could record a person’s words as he spoke them, word for word. This ability means that the words of Matthew are not only inspired by the Holy Spirit, but that they should represent an actual transcript of some of Christ’s sermons. For example, the Sermon on the Mount in chapters 5—7, is almost certainly a perfect recording of that great message.

Matthew, being a Hebrew had another intention, as well. It was Matthew’s intention to make the case to his fellow Jews that Jesus was, indeed, the promised Messiah. More than any other gospel, Matthew quotes the Old Testament to show how Jesus fulfilled the Messianic prophecies of the ancient scribes. Matthew describes in detail the lineage from David to Jesus, and used many forms of speech that his fellow Jews would have been comfortable with.

The Gospel of Mark

Although the book does not name its author, scholars are in agreement that this gospel was attributed to **Mark**, also known as John Mark. It is also agreed that this is the same John Mark that we read about in the book of Acts. His mother was a wealthy and prominent Christian in the Jerusalem church, and probably the church met in her home. He was an associate of the Apostle Peter, and it was from Peter that John Mark received first-hand information of the events and teachings of Jesus, and preserved them in written form.

It was John Mark who joined Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey. However, John Mark returned early because of hardship. So when it came time to go on the second mission, Paul and Barnabas had a sharp disagreement concerning John Mark. The two parted ways, but we read in II Timothy that Paul called for John Mark to join him because he was “profitable in his ministry.”

Where Matthew was written primarily to his fellow Jews, Mark writes to the Roman converts of Christianity. He gives the biography of Jesus to them as a comfort and a strength, as they face the possibilities of severe persecution for their faith.

The Gospel of Luke

The Gospel of Luke does not specifically identify its author. However there are sufficient clues in the prologue of this gospel and the book of Acts to conclude that it was, indeed, **Luke**, who wrote both books. From the context of the material in the book of Acts, we know that Luke was a Physician and a close companion of the Apostle Paul. Luke was a Greek convert to Christianity, which puts him in a class by himself. He is the only Gentile, the only non-Hebrew, who wrote a book of the scripture.

Luke’s specific audience was “the most excellent Theophilus,” but is generally understood to represent the Gentile nation, as a whole. As with the other two “synoptic Gospels,” the purpose of the Gospel of Luke is to reveal the Lord Jesus Christ and all that he began to do and to teach before he was taken up into heaven. Luke’s Gospel is also unique, in that it is a meticulous history—an “orderly” account—consistent with Luke’s medical mind—often giving details that the other accounts omit. Luke’s history of “The Great Physician” emphasizes his ministry to, and compassion for, Gentiles, Samaritans, women, children, tax collectors, sinners, and others regarded as “outcasts” in Israel.