

# BIBLE OVERVIEW - NEW TESTAMENT 1

## The First Three Gospels

It took a millennium to produce the Old Testament and a generation to produce the New. If the OT is a marathon, the NT is a sprint! Only 60 years between its earliest and latest recorded events

### The context

- *Political*. Roman Empire – law and order, peace, communications. Judea – an occupied country. Activity of the Zealots.
- *Cultural*. Greek the common language. Spread of Greek culture.
- *Religious*. Disillusionment with Greek philosophy. Rise of mystery religions. Lapse of Judaism into legalism – Pharisees, Sadducees, Scribes, Essenes.

### Why was the NT written?

- To spread the message
- To solve the problems
- To defend the faith

### What is a gospel?

“When, so the story goes, the chief librarian at the ancient university of Alexandria was sent a copy of one of the four Gospels, he was at a loss to know which section of the library it should be placed in. It was not fiction or drama, because it dealt with a living figure of history. But it was not simply history, because it covered only a short period of time and concentrated solely on one person – Jesus of Nazareth. It was not really biography either. It totally ignored the first thirty years of its subject’s life, gave no personal details or descriptions, had very little to say about his family, and gave an extraordinary amount of space to the events of his death. In the end the librarian decided to open a whole new category – ‘Gospel’, which simply means ‘good news’. It comes from the opening sentence of the book Mark wrote: ‘The beginning of the good news about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.’”

- *User’s Guide to the Bible* by Chris Wright

### Why four gospels?

Different accounts to meet the distinctive needs of a variety of communities of believers. Mark probably the first. Then it was ‘rewritten’ twice by Matthew and Luke to meet the particular needs of the communities they sought to convince. John was written independently of the other three to meet yet another need. Cf four portraits of Jesus.

The first three gospels - the ‘synoptic’ (= same view) gospels. They see the ministry of Jesus from broadly the same viewpoint and follow a similar general outline that traces the early life of Jesus; his baptism and temptations; the course of his ministry in Galilee, Samaria and Judea; the passion week and Jesus’ death and resurrection.

### Jesus’ teaching style

- Parable, e.g. Matthew 13
- Symbolic action, e.g. triumphal entry – Mark 11.1-11
- Sayings, e.g. Matthew 7.7-8
- Overstatement, e.g. Matthew 5.29-30

## Structure of Matthew

### *THE NEW LAW*

*Jesus a new and greater Moses*

The gospel is woven around five collections of Jesus' teachings, sometimes referred to as the five great discourses. Each discourse concludes with the refrain: 'When Jesus finished saying these things', or similar words (7.28; 11.1; 13.53; 19.1; 26.1). These five discourses, which lead up to the climax of the gospel in the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus, are presented between 'a fitting prologue (chs.1-2) and a challenging epilogue (28.16-20)' (NIV Study Bible).

Written to a group of early Jewish believers.

### Outline

Prologue: Birth and Infancy (1.1-2.23)

1. Narrative: Proclamation and Appearance of the Messiah (3.1-4.24)  
Teaching: The Sermon on the Mount (5.1-7.29)
2. Narrative: Miracles in Galilee (8.1-9.34)  
Teaching: The Mission of the Twelve (9.35-11.1)
3. Narrative: The Beginning of Opposition (11.2-12.50)  
Teaching: Parables of the Kingdom (13.1-53)
4. Narrative: The Revealing of the Messiah and his Mission (13.54-17.27)  
Teaching: The Nature and Authority of the Church (18.1-19.1a)
5. Narrative: From Galilee to Jerusalem (19.1b-23.39)  
Teaching: When the Son of Man comes (24.1-26.1a)

Climax: Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus (26.1b-28.15)

Epilogue: The Great Commission (28.16-20)

Matthew's purpose: (a) to reaffirm Jesus is the Messiah; (b) to affirm that God is in control; and (c) to confirm that Christians are the people of God.

## Structure of Mark

### *THE FAST-PACED GOSPEL*

*Mark reads like the script of an action movie*

- NIV Insight Bible

'Get ready! God is on his way!' (John the Baptist)

Turn your life around and believe! (1.15)

It focuses on events rather than speeches or editorial comments. The action is fast moving. Forty-two times the Greek adverb hurry-up is used, translated several ways into English.

### Outline

The beginning of the Gospel 1.1-13  
Jesus' public ministry in Galilee 1.14-9.50  
From Galilee to Jerusalem 10.1-52  
The last week in and near Jerusalem 11.1-15.47  
The resurrection of Jesus 16.1-8  
[*An Old Ending to the Gospel 16.9-20*]  
[*Another Old Ending 16.9-10*]

Did Mark take notes of Peter's sermons?

Mark probably written as an evangelistic book for people who knew next to nothing about the new Christian faith. May also have been one of the sources used by Matthew and Luke.

Mark's primary focus is on Jesus: his identity (1.11; 8.29; 9.7; 15.39; 16.6), his activity (1.21-34; etc.), his authority (1.22, 27), and his destiny (10.45).

Mark reveals a secondary focus on the disciples' tendency to misunderstand Jesus and to find his teaching difficult to grasp - 4.40-41; 6.48-52; 8.17-21; 8.31-33; 9.6; 9.32; 10.24; 10.32; 10.35-41; 14.40. Of these, 6.51,52 and 14.40 ('They did not know what to say') are unique to Mark. Is this the clue to the abrupt ending at 16.8? And to the first two words in 1.1?

## **Structure of Luke**

*GOOD NEWS FOR THE WHOLE WORLD*  
*'The Gospel of St Paul'*

### Outline

Introduction 1.1-4  
Birth and childhood of John the Baptist and of Jesus 1.5-2.52  
The ministry of John the Baptist 3.1-20  
The baptism and temptation of Jesus 3.21-4.13  
Jesus' public ministry in Galilee 4.14-9.50  
From Galilee to Jerusalem 9.51-19.27  
The last week in and near Jerusalem 19.28-23.56  
The resurrection, appearances and ascension of the Lord 24.1-53

Large sections of material found only in Luke – chapters 1-2 and 10-19

Luke's special interest in...

- Women (Elizabeth, Mary the mother of Jesus, Anna, widow at Nain, woman at house of Simon, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, woman with the haemorrhage, Martha and Mary, woman who offered two little copper coins, women at the tomb).
- The poor – 1.53; 2.7; 6.20; 7.22
- Social outcasts ('sinners')
- Jesus at prayer – seven occasions unique to Luke: 3.21; 5.16; 6.12; 9.18; 9.29; 11.1; 23.34,46.
- Jesus on prayer – three parables (11.5-13; 18.1-8; 18.11-13) and three sayings (21.36; 22.32; 22.40) about prayer.