



Why are there Four Gospels?

The words and deeds of Jesus were first told and retold by word of mouth. The church did not have a valid, written record for about 20 years, although uninspired documents abounded. They relied entirely on their inspired apostles and prophets for the accurate message. Then God moved qualified men to write the message as follows:

	Livelihood	Source	Validity	Self-reference	Date A.D.	Primary Target:	Secondary Target:	Purpose:
Matthew	Jewish collector of Roman taxes.	Mainly eyewitness	Apostle John 14:26	the house 9:10	50	Jewish readers	Men	To demonstrate that Jesus is the rightful King of Israel.
Mark		Peter / eyewitness	Apostle's disciple and prophet	Peter's house / fled naked Mark 14:50	68	Christians at Rome	Romans	To show that Jesus was a man of action .
Luke	Physician Colossians 4:14	Investigated Luke 1:1-4	Apostle's disciple and prophet	Luke 1:4 with Acts 1:1	59	A Roman official	Ladies and Gentiles	To write an authentic report of Jesus.
John	Fisherman Matthew 4:21	Eyewitness	Apostle John 14:26	John 1:14	85	Readers needing evidence	All	To present Jesus as the Son of God.

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The following pages are adapted from the instructor's unpublished work *The Book from God*:

THE GOSPELS

The underlying *purpose* in writing each Gospel was to create or strengthen the reader's faith in Christ. Each author wrote at a different point in time and to a different audience. Each had a particular emphasis and so included material - or left it out - in view of his personal objective in writing. Now we will look at the individual books.

MATTHEW

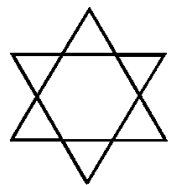
The author did not identify himself, but like the other two writers who were eyewitnesses, he does include himself in the story. He tells of having a banquet for Jesus. In the Gospel of Matthew he speaks of it as "the house" (9:10) while in the same story as recorded by Luke and Mark the feast took place at Levi's house. (Mark 2:15; Luke 5:29) It is reasonable to believe "the house" identified in Matthew 9:10 is Matthew's own house.

Uninspired writers who lived at the time of the release of the book said that Matthew wrote it.¹ Matthew's main source of information should be clear as we realize that he was with Jesus as an eyewitness throughout His ministry. Jesus had promised His twelve apostles that the Holy Spirit would enable them to remember what they saw and heard when it came time to use the information.² Matthew was included in this promise.

Evidence of the eyewitness nature of Matthew's Gospel is seen in the case of Jesus casting out a demon in the region of the Gadarenes. Mark³ and Luke record that one demon was cast out while the only eyewitness to the event, Matthew, records that there were two demons involved.⁴

Matthew's *purpose* in writing includes the evidence that Jesus has a legal right to be on the throne of David because he *is* a son of David. He opens his book with the following words: "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham."⁵ This is why Matthew begins with this ancestry list, so he can trace from Abraham, through David to Joseph the carpenter, the husband of Mary who was the mother of Jesus.

This would certainly build faith in a Jewish reader as he or she realized that Jesus fulfilled the promises of a long-awaited⁶ Son of David. Matthew



¹ Henry Thiessen, *Introduction to the New Testament*. Eerdmans, 1987. Page 130.

² John 14:26

³ Mark 5:1-2; Luke 8:27

⁴ Matthew 8:28. See the widely accepted chart at the end of the chapter designed to prove that Matthew copied from Mark.

⁵ Matthew 1:1, King James Version

⁶ Israel awaited the fulfillment of Nathan's promise to David in 2 Samuel 7:12-13. While Solomon fulfilled a part of the promise, they knew that a greater than Solomon was coming. The religious literature of the times demonstrated this in a popular (but non-Biblical) poem, *The Psalms of Solomon*:

comments more and quotes more conversations about Jesus being the kingly son of David than do the other writers.⁷ Additionally, there are about 55 references to the kingdom of heaven (or God) in Matthew. Matthew stresses the King and His kingdom.

Matthew *harmonizes* with other Bible writers. He quotes from Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Hosea, Micah and Zechariah. In all, he quotes about 65 times from the Old Testament. We think that he was the first of the four Gospel writers to write so it is not likely that he would be quoting from other New Testament writers. But he might have been *referred* to by John the Beloved. John explains about Jesus' work in Judea before John the Baptist was imprisoned.⁸ Since he did not write of the imprisonment himself, he may have been looking at Matthew 4:12 which tells what Jesus did after the imprisonment.⁹

Also, in 1 Corinthians, written about 54 A.D. Paul says that "...He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures."¹⁰ The usual understanding is that the reference is to the Old Testament Scriptures. The problem is that the Old Testament does not say this. However, it is entirely reasonable to say that Paul was quoting Matthew's Gospel that was written four years prior. If this is right, then we have here a case of Paul endorsing Matthew and calling it Scripture.

Then *when* did Matthew write? The destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans was in 70 A.D. Much of Matthew 24 is given over to a detailed warning about this coming event. So we put our date before 70 A.D. But since the Gospel spread to the Jew first and then to the Greek, it is reasonable to think that there was a demand from the Jews living in Jerusalem and the surrounding area for an accurate written record of the Life of Christ by one who was an eye witness. We suggest a date for the writing of Matthew at about 50 A.D.¹¹

Matthew is the only writer to use the term *Kingdom of heaven*, which he uses about 33 times. Four other times, while quoting Jesus, he uses the *Kingdom of God*.

Matthew quotes John the Baptist in Matthew 3:2 as saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Mark, while quoting Jesus in Mark 1:15 quotes Jesus as saying,

"Behold, O Lord, and raise up unto them their king, the son of David,
at the time which Thou knowest, O God,
that he may reign over Israel Thy servant,
and gird him with strength to break in pieces unrighteous rulers."

Quoted by A.F. Kirkpatrick in *The Book of Psalms*. Baker Book House. 1982.

⁷ Matthew 1:1,20; 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30,31; 21:9,15; 22:42,45. By comparison, Mark makes four references to Jesus being the Son of David and Luke includes five.

⁸ John 3:24.

⁹ Or he may have been looking at Mark 1:14.

¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 15:4.

¹¹ There may have been an earlier copy of Matthew written in Aramaic. Eusebius in his *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.39, in turn quotes Papias as saying, "Matthew composed his history in the Hebrew dialect, and everyone translated it as he was able." No copies of this composition have come down to us and the Gospel of Matthew that we have is an original composition in Greek, not a translation of something earlier.

"Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand." Jesus and John are talking about the same kingdom.

Another case is even more exact. Matthew says in 19:23, "that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven, while Mark 10:25 says "how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God." To further establish that there is no difference between the two kingdoms, Matthew speaks in 19:24 (the next verse) of the kingdom of God.

There is a system of interpreting prophecy that distinguishes between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God. There is no such distinction in Scripture. Matthew, following Jewish custom, simply avoids frequent use of God's name.

MARK

Like Matthew, the *author* did not name himself, but the careful reader can locate him in the story. History records the young man John Mark as the writer of the Gospel. Mark was a relative of Barnabas¹² and a "son" of the Apostle Peter.¹³ The early church was very careful that each approved gospel be closely connected with an apostle, so the apostle Peter is the connection that met that requirement.

First, let's look for Peter's influence in the Gospel of Mark. In Mark 1:29, the group came out of the Capernaum synagogue and went to the house of Simon and Andrew. Later, in verse 33, the whole city had gathered at the door. Jesus stayed there that night and early in the morning he rose and departed to a lonely place. When he returned to Capernaum in Mark 2:1, "he was at home."¹⁴ The Capernaum portion of Jesus' ministry appears to be centered at Peter's house.

Further evidence of the influence of Peter on the Gospel is seen in Mark 16:7 where the angel is quoted: "But go, tell his disciples and Peter...." Peter, sorrowful over his denial of Jesus, was singled out for special attention by one of the angels of heaven! (And he liked to tell about it!)

Now let's look for Mark in the story. After all, it is his gospel and the message from God came through both the apostles and prophets.¹⁵

There is an incident recorded by Mark that is not mentioned by the other writers. When Jesus was arrested in Gethsemane, all of the disciples "left him and fled. And a certain young man was following him wearing nothing but a linen sheet..."¹⁶

Who was that? It might have been Mark, the writer. Another clue seems to be in Mark 14:17 where it reads that "when it was evening he (Jesus) *came* with the twelve." Did Jesus come to Mark's house? To keep Judas from knowing where the twelve were going to have the Passover Feast, Jesus had sent two disciples to locate a *man* (Mark?) carrying a pitcher of

¹² Colossians 4:10

¹³ 1 Peter 5:13. "Son" here is used in the sense of disciple. See Matthew 12:27 for an example of this.

¹⁴ Other verses are Mark 2:2,4; 3:20,31; 7:17; 9:33; and 10:10.

¹⁵ Ephesians 3:5

¹⁶ Mark 14:50

water. They were to follow him home and then ask the owner of the house for the use of the upstairs guest room.

Now in Acts 12:12 we learn that "Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark" had a large house in Jerusalem where many could gather for prayer. It just could be that Jesus had the Last Supper in the upper guest room at John Mark's mother's house and that when the group left, teenage John, in bed at the time, grabbed some bed clothes and followed them to the Garden to see what was going to happen. That would qualify him as an eye witness to this part of the story.

Mark harmonizes with the Old Testament writers. He quotes from Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Joel, Zechariah and Malachi.

When could this gospel have been written? Because the destruction of Jerusalem is presented as something yet future in Mark 13:14, we place the time of writing before 70 A.D., perhaps about 68 A.D.

The most prevalent view today is that Mark was the first of the four gospels that was written. However, there are good arguments for a later date of writing. If Mark was written *before* Matthew, then the gospel would have been recorded for Greek-speaking readers in Rome even before it was for Palestinian readers. This is unlikely. ("To the Jew first . . .") Further, we know that Mark worked with Paul in the earlier part of his ministry¹⁷ but that he gathered the material for his gospel from Peter, who was eyewitness of the entire ministry of Jesus. We also know that he worked closely with Peter in the later years of Peter's ministry.¹⁸ We conclude that Mark was written after 60 A.D and not before Matthew and Luke.¹⁹

Evidence for late date:

- Rufus was in Rome by now. This might not have been true of an early date of writing.
- Mark may have omitted the early life of Christ because Matthew and Luke had given it proper attention.
- If this is Peter's Gospel, they would have had to have had extensive contact. Mark split with Paul about 49 and then went traveling with Barnabas. His time with Peter was not until later.
- Note the conclusion of Mark. The gospel had been confirmed. Mark 16:20
- Consider the brevity of the story as evidence of its later authorship.
- Lange sets a date of 68-70.

There is one other hint indicating a late date for Mark. He wrote after the age of

¹⁷ Acts 13:5. About 60 A.D, Paul mentioned Mark in Colossians 4:10, but there is no hint that he had already composed a Gospel. He seems to need Paul's endorsement.

¹⁸ 1 Peter 5:13, written about 62 A.D.

¹⁹ Clement of Alexandria: "After Peter had publicly preached the word in Rome and declared the Gospel by the Spirit, many who were present entreated Mark, as one who had followed him for a long time and remembered what he said, to write down what he had spoken, and Mark after composing the Gospel, presented it to his petitioners."

miracles according to Mark 16:19-20 where he puts the miracles as events of the past that had previously confirmed the Word.

While Matthew is written to the special interests of Jewish males, Mark does not present the ancestry, birth or early life of Jesus. His purpose is to write to an *action* people, the Romans. This can be seen in his choice of action words. The key word in the early chapters of Mark is "immediately" or "straightway" or some such word, depending on the translation used. Mark is a book filled with action.

A further clue that Mark is writing to Roman Christians is found in Romans 16:13 where Paul wanted Rufus greeted. When Mark is telling²⁰ about who carried the cross for Jesus, he mentions the father of Alexander and Rufus. If these bothers were unknown, why did Mark mention them? It is most reasonable that he was writing to the church at Rome where Rufus lived. This also calls for a late date.

John Mark's parents had selected names that helped in his great mission in life because *John* (Jonah) is a Hebrew name while *Mark* (Marcus) is Roman. It helps a writer if their name seems local to the reader rather than a name from another culture.

Mark learned about the life of Christ from two main sources: his own personal experience and from the apostle Peter. There is even a hint that Peter intended to write a gospel in 2 Peter 1:15. Mark may have included notes written by Peter into his story of Jesus. As an alternative, Mark may have heard Peter retell the story of Christ so many times that he knew it perfectly. Whatever the case, we have a marvelous, concise record of our Lord from the inspired pen of John Mark.

In Mark's short Gospel, he presents no less than 19 miracles of Christ. He is building faith in his readers as they realize that Jesus is the Lord of creation.

LUKE

This *author* differs from the other writers in that he was not a witness of any of the events that he writes about. Instead, he personally investigated the life of Christ so he could write the exact truth according to Luke 1:4. That statement is either a claim for inspiration or a demonstration of arrogance. Other facts point to it being a clear-cut claim for inspiration. It seems that a lot of writers were getting in on the opportunity to sell books about Christ and that not all of them were correct! (Times haven't changed, have they?)

There aren't any clues inside the Book of Luke to tell us who the author was, but it was written by the author of Acts. See Acts 1:1 and compare it with Luke 1:3. It can hardly be disputed that Luke is the author of both. He was with Paul on part of his journeys which gives this book the ring of apostleship. Colossians 4:14 shows that Luke was a physician by profession. A careful examination (pun intended) of Colossians 4:11 will show that Luke was a Gentile also. He is the only Gentile (non-Jewish) writer of the New Testament Scriptures.



He *harmonizes* with other Biblical writers. Luke quotes from Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, 1 Samuel, 2 Kings, Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, Micah and Malachi. In

²⁰ Mark 15:21

all, he quotes 43 times. Additionally, Luke is quoted by Paul in 1 Timothy 5:18 and his writing is called Scripture.

Luke's *purpose* in writing includes an emphasis on the universal nature of the gospel of Christ. While Matthew, in writing to Jewish men, shows that Jesus was from the proper family line, Luke traces him back to Adam, the head of all humanity, in Luke 3:38. Luke quotes Simeon in the Temple, who in turn, is quoting Isaiah that Jesus will be a light of revelation to the Gentiles. Only Luke tells the non-Jewish Good Samaritan story. Luke, the Gentile physician, takes special note that Jesus died to redeem the whole world.

Luke records 20 miracles and they strengthen our faith when we realize that a physician is reporting them and that he was especially impressed with the healings of the Great Physician.

Is there any way to assign a *date* to Luke? Yes. In fact we can be more definite with this one. We know from history that Festus came to Caesarea in 60 A.D. Paul had been imprisoned at Caesarea for two years before that. Further, Luke was on the trip with him as can be seen from the "we" references in Acts 21:1,17 and 18. So when Paul was in prison, Luke had plenty of time on his hands to inquire into these events personally. This places the writing of Luke at about 59 A.D.

Further, this trip to Jerusalem put Luke in touch with all of the principal players for writing both Luke and Acts. He appears to have talked with Mary. Luke's statement in 2:51 that she pondered all of these things in her heart points to this.

It is certain, then, that Luke relied on others for source material. Did each person that he relied on need to be an inspired person, too? No. Scripture, by definition, is *written*. Luke, guided by the Holy Spirit, *wrote* what was true. He may have heard lots of stories that were not true, but God did not allow these to be enshrined in Scripture.

JOHN

This Gospel was written by the person closest to Jesus. He did not name himself, but liked to show his extraordinary closeness to our Lord. He calls himself in John 13:23 "one of his disciples whom Jesus loved." It's difficult to imagine another disciple giving John that special honor.²¹

John clearly states his special *purpose* in writing his Gospel in 20:30-31, "...but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name."

John does not set out to give a picture of Christ's entire life. In fact, he covers only 20 days of his ministry! And of those 20 days, fully one-third of the book is devoted to just *one* day. Perhaps realizing this will bring John 21:25 to life for the reader where it reads, "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books which were written." (NASV)

John's *purpose* is to add contents that the other writers did not include as they wrote. This is why 92% of John is new material.

²¹ Similar passages are in John 19:26; 20:2; 21:7,20.

What was John's *source* of information? He answers the question. "We beheld his glory."²² And then he wrote it down. "This is the disciple who bears witness of these things and wrote these things; and we know that his witness is true."²³ Beyond that, it was John who wrote down and claimed Jesus' promise in John 14:26 that the Spirit would do two things for the apostles. "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.

When did John write? It seems that the other Gospels were already in circulation, so that would place the date after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Early traditions place it about 85 A.D.

John quotes from Genesis, Exodus, Psalms, Isaiah, Micah, and Zechariah, demonstrating that he was in *harmony* with Moses and the prophets of the Old Testament. Since he was one of the last living writer of the New Testament and since he wrote this book late in his career, it is not likely that any of the other writers quoted from John.

²² John 1:14.

²³ John 20:24.

The Most Significant 100 Years in History

Chronological Chart of New Testament Times

by Charles Dailey

		T	
[SH]	4 BC	'%	Death of Herod the Great
		'%	The life and ministry of Christ
	30	'%	Resurrection of Christ
		*	Gospel preaching among the Jews
	32	*	Conversion of Saul. Acts 9.
	35	*	Saul's 1st Visit to Jerusalem. Galatians 1.
		*	Peter teaches and immerses the first Gentiles. Acts 10
[SH]	44	*	Death of Herod Agrippa I. Acts 12. Spring.
	45	*	Matthew wrote Aramaic version of MATTHEW for Jews (???)
	46	*	Saul's 2nd visit to Jerusalem. Acts 11, Galatians 2
	47	*	James addressed JAMES to Jews. James 5
	47	%	1st Missionary Journey among Gentiles. Acts 13-14.
	48	%	Paul (Saul) returned to Antioch, a multi-cultural church.
	49	*	Paul's 3rd visit & the Jerusalem Conference. Acts 15.
	49	*	Paul returned to Antioch, wrote GALATIANS
	50	*	Matthew wrote Greek version of MATTHEW
	50	%	Paul's 2nd Missionary Journey. Acts 16-18
[SH]	51	%	Gallio becomes proconsul at Corinth. Acts 18.
	51	%	Paul at Corinth: 1 THESSALONIANS ; 2 THESSALONIANS
	52	%	Paul's 4th visit to Jerusalem; Antioch. Acts 18:22
		*	
	53	%	Paul's 3rd Missionary Journey. Acts 18:23 ff.
	54	%	From Ephesus: 1 CORINTHIANS
	55	%	From Macedonia: 2 CORINTHIANS
	56	%	From Corinth: ROMANS Romans 16:1,23
	58	%	Paul's 5th visit to Jerusalem. Acts 21
		*	
	58	%	Paul imprisoned at Caesarea. Acts 24
	59	%	Dr. Luke researched and wrote LUKE while waiting for Paul.
[SH]	60	%	Arrival of Festus in Caesarea, Paul sent to Rome. Acts 25
	60	%	Paul's house imprisonment at Rome. Acts 28
		%	He wrote: EPHESIANS , COLOSSIANS , PHILEMON
	61	%	He wrote: PHILIPPIANS . Luke wrote ACTS while he waited.
	62	%	Paul released from house arrest at Rome.
	62	*	1 PETER written by Peter.
		*	
	64/65	*	Paul in Macedonia: 1 TIMOTHY
	65	*	Paul in Asia Minor: TITUS
	66	*	2 PETER written by Peter
	67	*	Paul's Final Imprisonment. 2 TIMOTHY
	68	*	John Mark wrote MARK from Rome.
	69	*	HEBREWS
[SH]	70	*	Destruction of Jerusalem by the army of Titus.
	75	*	Jude wrote JUDE
	85	*	John wrote JOHN , 1 JOHN from Ephesus
	90	*	John wrote 2 JOHN , 3 JOHN
	96	*	John wrote REVELATION from the Isle of Patmos

[SH] = Dates established by secular history or archeology.