**Session 1**

**Introduction to the Four Gospels**

**A. What are the Gospels? The Literary Genre “Gospel”**

1. The Gospels are History

* They have a history of composition
* Set in a specific place and time
* Intended to present accurate historical material

As an essentially historical religion, Christianity rises or falls on the *historical reliability* of the Gospel record:

* *With respect to the claims Jesus made concerning himself*
* *With respect to the gospel miracle tradition*
* *With respect to his resurrection – the vindication of Jesus' claims.*

2. The Gospels are Narrative

*What are the features of narrative?*

3. The Gospels are Theology

* *Not mere biographies*
* *Written with a theological purpose:*

*Implications?* Questions to be asked:

(1)

(2)

(3)

Each Gospel writer relates certain stories and emphasizes particular themes to bring out their particular purpose and to achieve their particular goal.

*In summary, we can classify the Gospels as \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ motivated by \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ concerns.*

*Their Purpose:*

* *To Convey Accurate Historical Information*
* *To Explain and Interpret these Salvation-Bringing Events*
* *To proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ*

**B. Why Four Gospels in the New Testament?**

1. Different church communities with unique needs

Each Gospel writer addresses the needs and concerns of that community.

2. The Holy Spirit wanted to give the Church 4 portraits of Jesus

* Matthew: The Messianic King of the Jews
* Mark: The Suffering Servant of the LORD
* Luke: The Savior for lost people everywhere
* John: The Divine Son who reveals the Father

*Implications?*

(1)

(2)

(3)

**C. Why only four Gospels? The Apocryphal Gospels**

*Why not these other “Gospels”*

1. Evidence of late composition
2. Pseudepigraphic Authorship
3. Teaching contrary to Jesus and the apostolic church
4. Confirmation by the Holy Spirit

**D. The Three “Synoptic” Gospels and John**

*Synopsis =* “viewed together”

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Synoptic Gospels** | **Gospel of John** |
| * One Movement: From Galilean to Jerusalem | * Back and forth between Judea and Galilee |
| * Few time refererences (1 year ministry?) | * Three Passovers (3 year ministry) |
| * Short episodes (pericope) of miracles and teachings | * Extended monologues and dialogues |
| * Jesus’ messianic role/ inaugurator of the Kingdom | * Jesus as the Pre-existent Son who reveals the Father |

**E. Principles for Reading and Teaching the Gospels**

1. Avoid Harmonization. Respect each Gospel’s narrative & theological unity.

2. Read Vertically: Respect the literary context.

3. Read Horizontally: Discerning by comparison each Gospel’s narrative theology.

4. Read through first century eyes: Respect the Gospel’s historical context.

**Session 2**

**Mark’s Gospel**

**The Gospel of the Suffering Son of God**

*Two key sides of Mark’s Christology: Son of God and Servant of the LORD*

**A. The Mighty Deeds of the Powerful Son of God**

**1. Authority in Words and Deeds**

a. Jesus' authoritative message: *"The Kingdom of God is at hand"* (1:14-15)

b. Authority in calling (1:16-20) and appointing (3:13-19) the disciples

c. Authority in teaching (1:22)

d. Authority in exorcism and healing (1:23-28, 29-34)

e. Divine authority to forgive sins (2:1-12)

f. Authority over the Law (2:23-28)

g. Authority over nature (4:35-41)

**2. The Climax and Turning Point: Peter’s Confession**

* Based on all he has seen, Peter says, “You are the Messiah”
* Transition from the Mighty Messiah to Suffering Servant: The Axis upon which the Gospel turns

**B. The Suffering Role of the Servant of the Lord**

*Though Jesus is the All-Powerful Son of God, his role at his first coming is not to conquer, but to suffer and die as the Servant of the Lord (Isaiah 53).*

**1. Early Opposition to Jesus’ Authority**

a. Five Controversy Stories (2:1–3:6)

* Healing a paralyzed man (2:1-12)
* Dining with sinners (2:13–17)
* Questioned about fasting (2:18–22)
* Lord of the Sabbath (2:23–28)
* Healing on the Sabbath (3:1–6)

b. Dining with sinners and defining his ministry (2:13-17)

c. Climax: Healing on the Sabbath and the Plot to Kill Jesus (3:1-6)

2. The Division of Israel: Insiders (the “Disciple-Family”) vs. Outsiders (3:16-6:6)

a. Jesus’ family thinks he’s crazy, 3:20-21

b. The Beelzebul controversy, 3:20-35

* The religious leaders seal their fate by rejecting the Spirit’s work testifying to Jesus.

c. Family arrives: New spiritual relationships, 3:31-35

d. Teaching in parables, 4:1-34

* Jesus’ teaching in parables *immediately follows* the Beelzebul controversy in the context of Jesus' identification of his true family as “those who do the will of my Father.”
* The Purpose of Parables (background, Isaiah 6:9-10): *To Reveal and To Conceal. To those open to his Kingdom message, the parables illuminate the meaning of the Kingdom. But to those who through their hard-heartedness reject the message, the parables hide the truth.*
* *Everything has changed. The nation through its leaders is rejecting the Messiah. Their fate is sealed so that God now hardens their heart* (cf. Pharaoh in the Exodus account)

e. Crisis in Jerusalem

* 1. Jesus’ Triumphal Entry (11:1-10)
* Jesus enters Jerusalem as the king predicted in Zechariah 9:9.
* A public revelation of his Messiahship: The Messianic Secret is over.

(2) Judging Israel (11:11-26; a Markan intercalation)

(a) Cursing the Fig Tree (11:11-14)

(b) The Temple Cleansing (11:15-18)

(c) The Withered Fig Tree (11:20-26)

(3) Climax: The Parable of the Tenant Farmers (12:1-12)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Isaiah 5:1-8**  The owner:  The vineyard:  The problem:  The result: | **Mark 12:1-12**  The owner:  The vineyard:  The tenant farmers:  The servants:  The son:  The problem:  The results: |

**C. Following the Path of the Servant: Discipleship in Mark’s Gospel**

1. The disciples serve primarily as a *negative* model

a. They don't understand Jesus’ teaching (4:13; 7:18)

b. They don't understand Jesus’ mission (8:32-33; 9:31-32)

2. Three key “cycles” or series of incidents

*The pattern:*

* + Jesus predicts his death;
  + The disciples exhibit pride or lack of awareness;
  + Jesus teaches on humility or servant leadership

a. Mark 8:31-38

b. Mark 9:30-50

c. Mark 10:32-45

3. Conclusion: Discipleship is following Jesus' way of suffering

**D. Mark’s Strange Ending: A Call for Faith over Fear**

1. The Events

a. Discovery of the empty tomb (vv. 1–4)

b. The angel’s announcement (vv. 5–7)

c. The fear & silence of the women (v. 8)

2. An Important Clarification:

a. The Resurrection has occurred!

* An angel has announced it (16:6)
* Jesus has predicted it many times (Mark 8:31; 9:9-10, 31; 10:34; 14:28)

b. Jesus has appeared to his disciples

* The angel predicts it (16:7)
* Jesus predicted it (14:28)

3. The Longer Ending

1. It isn’t in our earliest manuscripts.
2. The style is dramatically different from the rest of Mark’s Gospel.
3. The theology is different from the rest of Mark’s Gospel.
4. It appears to be a summary of the resurrection narratives from the other Gospels.
5. Conclusion: This ending was added by a later scribe because of the abrupt ending.

4. Options?

1. An Unfinished Gospel?
2. A Lost Ending?
3. An Intentional Call for Faith over Fear

**Matthew’s Gospel:**

**The Gospel of the Messiah**

**A. Matthew’s Structure and Style**

**1. Concise Style**

*Matthew’s individual stories are more abbreviated and concise than Mark’s.*

**2. Fulfillment Formulas**

*“This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet….”*

**3. Structural “Signals”**

*a. “And it came about when Jesus finished these words…*”

(7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1)

(1) The Sermon on the Mount (chs. 5-7)

(2) Commissioning of the Twelve (ch. 10)

(3) Parables of the Kingdom (ch. 13)

(4) Church Life and Discipline (ch. 18)

(5) Woes & Olivet Discourse (chs. 23-25)

*A Christian Pentateuch?*

*b. “From that time Jesus began to…*” (4:17; 16:21)

*The resulting outline:*

(1) The Person of the Messiah (1:1-4:16)

***Transition:*** *“From that time Jesus began to preach and say, 'Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.” (4:17)*

(2) The Proclamation of the Messiah (4:17-16:20)

***Transition:*** *“From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things” (16:21)*

(3) The Suffering, Death and Resurrection of the Messiah (16:21-28:20)

**B. Promise–Fulfillment: A Key Theme in Matthew’s Gospel**

**1. Matthew and Prophetic Fulfillment**

*Various kinds of “fulfillment”*

a. Direct, Single, or Literal fulfillment

*Examples:*

* *Bethlehem birth fulfills Micah 5:2* (Matt. 2:5-6)
* *Jesus establishes his ministry in Galilee, fulfilling Isaiah 9:1-2* (Matt 4:14-16)
* *Jesus heals disease, fulfilling Isaiah 53:4* (Matt. 8:17)
* *Jesus fulfills the role of the "Servant" of Isaiah 42:2* (Matt. 12:17-21)
* *Jesus’ enters Jerusalem as the humble king of Zechariah 9:9* (Matt. 21:4-5)

b. Typological fulfillment

*Examples:*

* *Jesus’ virginal conception fulfills Isaiah 7:14 (Matt. 1:23)*
* *The escape to, and return from Egypt, fulfills Hosea 11:1* (Matt. 2:15)

c. Analogical fulfillment

* *The murder of the infants of Bethlehem fulfills Jeremiah 31:15* (Matt. 2:17-18)

* *Jesus speaks in parables, fulfilling Psalm 78:2; 2 Chr. 29:30* (Matt. 13:35)

**2. The Genealogy**

a. Jesus the son of Abraham

b. Jesus the son of David

**3. Typology**

a. The New Moses

* Five Discourses = a new Pentateuch?
* Sermon on the Mount = a new “Law”?
* The Transfiguration

b. The New David

* Genealogy through David
* The “Son of David” title
* “Christ” = the Messiah from David’s line

c. The New Israel

* Israel as God’s “Son”. Exodus 4:22-23: *Thus says the Lord, “Israel is my son, my firstborn.”*
* Like Israel, Jesus comes from Egypt (Matt. 2:14-15 citing Hosea 11:1).
* At the Temptation, Jesus succeeds where Israel in the Wilderness failed (Matt. 4:1-11). “If you are the Son of God.” Jesus’ forty days of temptation in the wilderness are analogous to Israel's forty years, and the three Old Testament passages Jesus cites (Deut 8:3; 6:13, 16) are all related to Israel's failures in the wilderness.
* Temptation 1: Israel was tested with hunger so that she would learn dependence on God (Deut. 8:3), but failed to do so. Jesus depends wholly on God for his sustenance, quoting Deut. 8: *"Man shall not live by bread alone."*
* Temptation 2: Israel put God to the test at Massah/Meribah (Deut. 6:16; Exod. 17:1-7). Jesus refuses to throw himself from the temple and so test the Lord God, citing Deut. 6:16: *“Do not test the LORD your God”*
* Temptation 3: Israel was commanded to worship God alone (Deut. 6:13-15), but turned to idolatry (Deut. 9:12; Judges 3:5-7). Jesus rejects the devil's offer of the kingdoms of the world in exchange for his worship, quoting Deut. 6:13: *“Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only”*
* Isaiah’s “Servant of the LORD”: Jesus, like Israel, is the Servant of the Lord who brings light to the nations.
* In Isaiah, sometimes the “Servant” is the nation Israel: Isaiah 44:1 *“But now listen, O Jacob, my servant, Israel, whom I have chosen…”*
* In other places, the “Servant” is an individual who brings salvation to Israel: Isaiah 42:1 *“Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations.”*

**The Gospel of Luke:**

**The Gospel of the Savior for Lost People Everywhere**

**A. Luke’s Structure**

1. Birth Narrative (chs. 1–2)

2. Galilean Ministry of the Messiah (3–9:50)

3. The Journey to Jerusalem (9:51–ch. 19)

4. The Messiah Confronts Jerusalem (chs. 19–21)

5. The Passion of the Messiah (chs. 22-23)

6. The Resurrection & Ascension of the Messiah (ch. 24)

**B. Central Theme: The Gospel of the Savior for Lost People Everywhere**

1. The Call of Levi: Calling sinners, not the (self-)righteous (Luke 5:27-32)

2. Parables of Lost Things (Luke 15)

*Themes: Lost causes sorrow; finding produces great joy*

*The actions of the prodigal: All are sinners*

*The actions of the father: God loves the lost*

*The actions of the older son: So should we*

3. Zacchaeus, a chief tax-collector: To seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:1–10)

*A chief sinner among sinners*

*Zacchaeus, a son of Abraham*

*Key verse: Luke 19:10*

*Luke’s Purpose in Luke-Acts*

* In the Gospel: Jesus is the Savior of the poor, the lost & the outcast
* In Acts: The message of Salvation goes to the whole world (= the Gentiles).

Luke’s overall purpose in Luke-Acts is to show that the Gospel that began in Judaism fulfills God’s plan to save the world. This confirms that the church made up of Jews and Gentiles represents God’s people for the present age of salvation.

**C. The Jewish Roots of the Gospel: The Birth Narrative (chs. 1-2)**

1. The Old Testament “Flavor” or the Narrative

2. The Characters in the Narrative

3. Jesus/John parallels

4. The Identity of Jesus, 1:32-35

5. The Birth of Jesus (2:1-20): Born in Bethlehem to a Davidic Heir

6. Transition The Presentation in the Temple and Simeon’s Oracles (2:29-35).

**D. The Nazareth Sermon: Good News for the Poor**

* Jesus the herald of salvation: “Today this scripture has been fulfilled”
* Defines Jesus’ ministry as to the poor and oppressed (Isa. 61:1-2)
* Foreshadows the salvation of the Gentiles
* Foreshadows Jesus’ rejection

**E. Some Key Thematic Passages: The Gospel for all People**

1. Rich and Poor

a. Mary’s Magnificat: God exalts the poor & humbles the proud (1:50–53)

b. The parable of the rich fool (12:13-21)

c. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus (16:19-31)

d. The rich young ruler (18:18–30)

2. Sinners

a. Anointing by a sinful woman (7:36-50)

b. The parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (18:9-14)

c. Forgiveness from the cross and the repentant criminal (23:34, 39–43)

3. Samaritans

a. The parable of the Good Samaritan (10:29-37)

b. Ten lepers healed (17:11-19)

c. In Acts, the Gospel goes to the Samaritans (Acts 8)

4. Women

a. Key players in the birth narrativve (Luke 1–2)

b. The women who supported Jesus (Luke 8:2)

c. The story of Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38–42)

5. Gentiles

a. Simeon’s oracle in Luke 2:32 (cf Acts 13:47): “a light...to the Gentiles”

b. The quote of Isaiah 40:3-5 in Luke 3:6

c. Luke’s genealogy (Luke 3:23-38)

d. Healing a Centurion's Servant (7:1-10)

e. The Parable of the Great Banquet (14:15-24)

**The Gospel of John**

**The Gospel of the Son Who Reveals the Father**

**A. John’s Purpose: A Call to Decision**

John’s Gospel contains a clear statement of purpose in 20:30, 31:

*Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 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.*

**B. The Structure of John**

1. Prologue (1:1–18)

2. The Book of Signs (1:19–12:50)

3. The Book of Glory/Passion (13:1–20:31)

4. Epilogue (21:1–25)

**C. John’s Central Theme: The Revelation of the Father through the Son**

1. The Prologue: God’s Self-revelation through the Son (John 1:1-18)

a. The Chiastic Structure of the Prologue

b. The Background to the *Logos* (“Word”)

c. The Full Deity and True Humanity of the *Logos*

d. The Unity and Individuality of the Godhead

e. Creation and New Creation

f. John the Baptist as Herald of Salvation, *Not* Its Accomplisher

g. The Old Covenant (Law) as Preparatory, *Not* the Fulfillment

h. New Family Relationships: Based on Spiritual Birth “From Above”

i. The Self-Revelation of God through the Word, v. 18

2. The Revelation of the Son through “Signs” (Miracles)

a. The Seven Signs

While the Gospel records only eight miracles of Jesus, each is used to demonstrate the spiritual truth about who Jesus is and what he will accomplish. In this regard, the word “signs” that John uses to describe the miracles of Jesus is particularly significant. These signs are meant to provoke a response from the hearers

*The Signs:*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Water into wine, John 2:1-11  Official’s son healed, 4:43-54  Healing at Bethesda Pool, 5:1-15  Feeding of the 5000, 6:1-14 | e. Walking on water, 6:16-21  f. Healing the man born blind, 9:1-12  g. Lazarus raised, 11:1-43  Epilogue: Miraculous catch of fish, 21:1-14 |

b. The Purpose of the Signs (2:11)

c. The Climactic Sign and its Result (ch. 11)

3. The Revelation of the Son through Personal Conversations

a. Comparing the Two Interviews

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| --- | --- |
| *The Nicodemus interview; John 3*  (1) Jesus sparks interest (v. 3)  (2) Jesus turns to spiritual issues (v. 5)  (3) Jesus identifies himself (vv. 13ff.) (implicit call to respond) | *The Woman at the Well; John 4*  (1) Jesus sparks interest (vv. 7, 10)  (2) Jesus turns to spiritual issues (v. 13, vv. 21-24)  (3) Jesus identifies himself (v. 26)  (implicit call to respond) |

b. Contrasting Responses as a Microcosm of the Gospel Story

*He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. 12 Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—* John 1:11-12

4. The Revelation of the Son through Dialogue and Debate

a. The nature of the debates

b. The identity of the “Jews”

5. The Revelation of the Son through “I am” Statements.

a. The “I am” statements

Jesus’ identity is particularly revealed in statements concerning his relationship to the Father and in his famous “I am” statements:

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| --- | --- |
| The Bread of Life, 6:35  The Light of the world, 8:12, 9:5  The Door, 10:7  The Good Shepherd, 10:11, 14 | The Resurrection and the Life, 11:25  The Way, the Truth and the Life, 14:6  The True Vine, 15:1 |

b. The “I am” statements and Jesus’ “signs”

c. The “I am” statements and Jewish festivals

d. The absolute “I AM” statements (John 8:58)