

# Jesus Overview in the Gospels

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## Contents

1. Jesus in the Four Gospels	2
2. Jesus' Birth	7
3. Jesus' Baptism	11
4. Jesus' Temptations	15
5. Jesus' Mission	20
6. Jesus' Twelve Disciples	25
7. Jesus' Identity	29
8. Jesus' Teaching	34
9. Jesus' I AM statements 1	39
10. Jesus' I AM statements 2	43
11. Jesus' Encounters	47
12. Jesus Reaches Out	52
13. Jesus' Last Night	57
14. Jesus' Last Teaching	64
15. Jesus' Last Prayer	69
16. Jesus the Dying King	74
17. Jesus the Risen King	80
18. Jesus the Ascended King	85

# 1. Jesus in the Four Gospels

In the New Testament, we have four accounts of the life of Jesus Christ which are Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. These are called Gospels. But what is a Gospel, how are the four accounts different or similar and what were the main points each writer sought to communicate?

## What the Gospels are!

Firstly they are called Gospels, because they gave substance to the Gospel or Good News as described by Paul in *Romans 1v16 (The Message)*: “*this extraordinary Message of God's powerful plan to rescue everyone who trusts him, starting with Jews and then right on to everyone else!*”

We know that Jesus Christ during his time on earth wrote nothing, yet the stories about him were preserved and passed on by Christian teachers and evangelists. For the first thirty years or so, these stories were possibly collated and stored together. That would explain the similarity in the four accounts of Jesus' life. They are not an exhaustive biographical detail of all that Jesus did. Similarly they are also not diaries reflecting a daily account of Jesus' life. Rather they are selective accounts of His life, and were probably factual illustrations used by His disciples when preaching about Him. Therefore they would represent the theology of the disciples, as each story about Jesus is told. That is why they are trustworthy accounts as well as rooting Jesus' life in first century Judaism and the Greco-Roman world.

The first three of our Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke are what are called the synoptic Gospels. This is based on their great similarity and possibly use of a common source. Mark is probably the first Gospel as it is shorter in length than Matthew or Luke and it would appear that Matthew and Luke used Mark as a guide and elaborated where required. Mark wrote none of the great discourses of Matthew (*Mark 13* being the exception), such as the Sermon on the Mount, nor

does Mark show the great parables that Luke recorded, such as the Good Samaritan. Surely if Mark had used either the accounts of Matthew or Luke, he would have used those two examples! Matthew is closer in similarity to Mark than Luke. Luke does share large portions of Mark and quite often verbatim, and with a greater use of the Greek language.

John on the other hand, while still telling about Jesus' ministry, has vastly different story content. Whereas in the synoptic Gospels Jesus talks about the Kingdom of God frequently, in the Gospel of John, Jesus talks about himself much more often, as in the seven I AM statements. For this reason, John was probably written later than the synoptic Gospels.

## Four Different Portraits

### Gospel of Matthew

*Matthew 16v16 - Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."*

*Matthew 28v18 - Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."*

Matthew wrote primarily to Jews who knew the Old Testament. He wrote to present Jesus as the Messiah to Israel. He also records Israel's attitude towards Him as Messiah. Throughout this Gospel, Matthew gives us the genealogy, presentation, and the authentication of Jesus as the Christ Messiah. Matthew then shows the nation of Israel's opposition to and rejection of Jesus as the Christ, followed by Jesus' rejection of Israel due to her unbelief. He then records the death and resurrection of Christ. He concludes with Christ commissioning the disciples. Throughout, this Gospel is a well ordered and balanced account.

## Gospel of Mark

*Mark 8v34 - "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.*

*Mark 10v45 - For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*

Mark presents Jesus as the Suffering Servant of the Lord, coming in fulfilment of the Old Testament. Jesus offers His credentials, gathers His disciples, offers the Kingdom of God and its message. Jesus' teaching is seen in short parables, which hide the truth from those hardened against Him, yet prepares and instructs those responsive to Him. Overall Jesus calls those who follow him to serve others and to deny themselves by taking up their own cross, just as He took. Early tradition states that Mark's Gospel had a connection with the Apostle Peter, and was therefore written to preserve some of Peter's memories before his death.

## Gospel of Luke

*Luke 1v3-4 -Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.*

*Luke 19v10 -For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.*

Luke presents Jesus as the God-Man, as a saviour for the entire world, writing primarily to Gentiles. He does this from a broad vantage point that is compatible with the fact that he is a Greek. Luke traces the incarnation, Christ's introduction, ministry, rejection, subsequent teaching in view of His rejection, the cross, resurrection and ascension. Even though a Gentile, Luke emphasizes the kingdom program with Israel's place in the kingdom. This Gospel is not complete in itself, but is rather the first of two parts, with the Book of Acts being the second section.

Both are addressed to Theophilus (*Luke 1v1-4 & Acts 1v1*). The author is probably the Luke identified by Paul as a doctor, and was one of Paul's travelling companions (*Colossians 4v14; Philemon 24; 2 Timothy 4v11*). The style and language used are those of a native Greek speaker.

## Gospel of John

*John 1v9 & 12: The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world... Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God*

*John 20v31: - These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

John presents the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ so that mankind would believe in him as the Son of God, Messiah, and Saviour of the world. His selective argument portrays Christ as the God-Man. John records miracles and messages that affirm the deity and humanity of Christ. John builds his record around the public ministry of Christ, the private ministry, the cross, and the resurrection.



For more to think about please do ask yourself the following questions and see how you respond or react to them. Then why not share your answers with your spouse or a close friend, so that you can pray over any issues together.

Q1. Read **Mark 8v34** and **Mark 10v45**. How strongly am I encouraged to carry my own cross, knowing that Jesus carried His cross?

Q2. Read **Luke 1v34** and **Luke 19v10**. If Jesus gave up everything to seek me, what more can I give, in order to help spread the good news of Him?

Q3. Read **Matthew 16v16** and **Matthew 28v18**. If Jesus is still living and has authority, how is that a help to me as I live a life worthy of His name?

Q4. Read **John 1v9-12** and **John 20v31**. As a Christian Disciple and therefore a child of God, how is Jesus working on and changing me?

## 2. Jesus' Birth

Please do read the following verses from the Bible of your choice

**Matthew 1v1-17.**

**Luke 1v26-38**

**Luke 2v1-7**

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That Jesus was a man is not really disputed. The birth of Jesus is extraordinary at every level. The primary documents about him, found in the Bible, says that he was born of a woman, which in itself tells us that at least in a prenatal state he was nurtured and formed as any other male baby was and is. On the physical level, Jesus was born as any person is, but as regards his conception, He was conceived like no other person – conceived by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1v35). This was so that Jesus would not be given the sinful nature past that all humans have. Jesus was fully human and fully divine. Other documents, outside of the Bible from that time period also attest to Jesus and his existence.

Throughout the Old Testament, there is a witness to the birth of the Messiah, the Saviour. From the time of the first sin done by Adam, through the creation of Israel, the life of the Patriarchs and Kings and the oracles of the Prophets – all looking forward to the Messiah coming. The 5 Covenants that God made with people all look forward to this Messiah, this King. This King was to be their hope, their Saviour. His genealogy takes his physical line back to Abraham via David. Abraham was the father of Israel and David the first King. He grew into maturity as any young Jewish boy did.

## What's in a name?

When Jesus was born, his name imbued the very reason he was born. His conception and birth were extraordinary at every level. So important is our understanding of the birth of Jesus that no fewer than 4 angels come to give us a full picture of the event. Do you think that his parents, Joseph & Mary, or God, ever gazed upon him, and thought "How misnamed he is"! They did not, because they knew the very purpose for which he was born. Did Jesus ever think of how misnamed he was? Certainly not! His name means one who saves, or a rescuer. The entirety of his birth, life and death were centred on this very role. His role was to save all those who would follow Him.

He is the most talked about person in history. Almost everyone has an opinion about him. He was born to confirm God's promises, to reveal God as a Father, and to be our representative before Him. He gave us an example of how to live a holy life to the full. He was not merely a man who received some special power. He was not some strange creation that was half man and half God, with his human nature somehow absorbed into the divine. He was, as we shall see in this series, much more than those ideas!

One of the Church Fathers, Anselm, wrote that God's salvation plan for humans involved triumphant victory over sin, death and the grave. However no person could be found that was eligible or capable to do this. Because of this, God stepped into human history, so that this victory could be achieved. This God-man would be fully human, so as to live every feature of humanity, including suffering and death. This God-man would also need to remain fully God, so as to defeat sin, death and the grave. Jesus, being sinless, was this God-man, consisting as he did of two complete natures, the God nature and the human nature. That is why Jesus being both fully God and fully human is all important – without either, He could not be the long awaited Messiah and Saviour.

That Jesus is both human and divine is what makes Christianity unique amongst the world's religions. It is why Jesus' claims to be the only way to God are true and make sense, and it is why millions of people today worship Him and acknowledge Him as their Lord and their God. From what we know of his childhood and early life, we know that he grew in stature and wisdom (Luke 2v52)



For more to think about please do read **Matthew 1v18-2v23**. Ask yourself the following questions and see how you respond or react to them. Then why not share your answers with your spouse or a close friend.

1. How important to me is every aspect of the conception and birth of Jesus Christ?
2. What lessons can I learn from other characters in these early chapters of the Gospels – Joseph, Mary, Shepherds, Wise Men, Simeon and Anna.
3. What aspects of the whole story of Jesus physical conception and birth am I not familiar with?