

Christology 101

Lesson 15

The Life of Christ in the Gospels

The Old Testament gave a standard that said everything must be established by the testimony of at least 2 or 3 witnesses. The New Testament gives 4 witnesses to the Life of Jesus Christ: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Each Gospel has some of the same stories, and each has some unique material. It is best to think of them as complementary and not contradictory. They are different because they are written to different audiences at different times with slightly different emphases. The authors all believed in the deity and humanity of Christ, His sinless life, atoning death, literal resurrection, and gospel commission. Matthew was written to the Jews and presents Jesus as the Messiah, the King of the Jews. Mark was written to the practical Romans and presents Jesus as a man of action, the Servant of Jehovah. Luke was written to the cerebral and humanistic Greeks and presents Jesus as the Son of Man. John was the last written and the most theological. It was written to the Gentiles after the fall of the nation of Israel to the Romans. It presents Jesus as the Son of God.

We are going to look briefly at a summary of the Four Gospels and then move to John's Gospel to see how he develops the Life of Christ with a very definite purpose.

The Four Gospels

The Gospel of Matthew

Matthew is one of four accounts of the life, death, and resurrection of this Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. These first four books of the NT are called the Gospels, meaning "good news." Matthew, Mark, and Luke are often called the "synoptic" Gospels because they tell Christ's story from similar points of view (see [Mark: Date and Location](#)).

While Christ was on earth, he and his disciples evangelized mainly among their fellow Jews, though their ministry did attract many Gentiles as well. Before his ascension, Christ made it clear that Gentiles were to hear the gospel as well (see [28:19](#); [Acts 1:8](#)). The book of Acts records the disciples' enthusiastic response as they took the Good News throughout the Roman Empire. In his letter to the Romans, Paul explained how this universal proclamation of Christ fulfilled God's ultimate intention that all nations would be blessed and would come to faith in him through Israel, his chosen people (see [Gen. 12:1-3](#)).

Author

Matthew, also known as Levi ([Mark 2:14](#)), a tax collector ([9:9](#)) who became an apostle ([10:3](#)).

Date

Uncertain. Some date it in the early 50s A.D., while others date in the mid-60s. See [Mark: Date and Location](#).

Recipients

Jews living in Palestine.

Purpose

Matthew wrote some 20 years after Christ's death and resurrection. The Jewish nation as a whole had summarily rejected Jesus as their Messiah. Matthew knew that they would soon face the destruction of their very national and religious life ([24:1-2](#)). Meanwhile they endured the oppressive yoke of Rome with no relief in sight. Matthew took his pen in hand to reintroduce Jesus to the Jews and to show that he was truly what he claimed to be, the Messiah, King of Israel. He pointed to the future when Jesus would return to the earth and set up his Kingdom and realize all the promises made to the patriarchs and Israel. Until that time, Jesus' followers should give themselves to making and baptizing disciples and teaching them the things that Jesus taught ([28:19-20](#)).

Unique Features

- Matthew is the only Gospel containing the word *church* ([16:18](#); [18:17](#)).
- Matthew records five great sermons by Jesus:
 - » The Sermon on the Mount ([5-7](#))
 - » The sending of the 12 ([10](#))
 - » The parables of the Kingdom ([13](#))
 - » The seven woes on scribes and Pharisees ([23](#))
 - » The Olivet discourse on the end times ([24-25](#))
- Matthew is the most systematic Gospel, grouping together similar things such as discourses, parables, and miracles.
- Matthew emphasizes final rewards and punishments. The words *judgment*, *hell*, *fire*, *hypocrite*, or *woe* are found on almost every page.

(Source: Willmington's Bible Handbook)

The Gospel of Mark

Author

Tradition holds that John Mark, who apparently was brought to the Lord by Peter ([1 Pet. 5:13](#)), wrote this Gospel using Peter's sermons as his main source. Thus, Mark lets us see Jesus through Peter's eyes. Mark, the unfaithful servant who deserted Paul on his first missionary journey ([Acts 15:37-39](#)), apparently was faithful in his service with Peter and was therefore chosen to write this Gospel of the obedient Servant (see [Purpose](#)). Some translations of [Acts 13:5](#), [13](#) refer to John Mark simply as John. Peter stayed in the home of Mark's mother after his release from prison ([Acts 12:12](#)).

Date and Location

About A.D. 57-59. Irenaeus said Mark was written after the deaths of Peter and Paul, c. 67-68, but both Clement of Alexandria and Origen placed it during Peter's lifetime, saying that Peter helped in its production and approved its use by the church. There is wide agreement that Mark's record of Peter's sermons was one of the "eyewitness" accounts Luke used in writing Luke and Acts

(see [Luke 1:1-4](#); [Acts 1:1](#)). Since Acts ends with Paul still in prison before his first release in 62, Mark must have been written before that time. Most scholars agree that Matthew used Mark as a source as well.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke are often called the “synoptic” Gospels (see [Matthew: Background](#)). Only about 30 verses in Mark contain accounts not paralleled in either Matthew or Luke. As any casual reader will realize, however, while Matthew and Luke may have borrowed from Mark, they each tell the stories in their own unique way, often adding details Mark omitted. And Mark himself includes many details and insights the other two omit.

Most church fathers agree that Mark wrote his Gospel from Rome. [Colossians 4:10](#) places him in Rome with Paul c. 61.

Recipients

Gentile Roman Christians, as indicated by

- Mark’s portrait of Jesus as a man of action, which would have fit the Roman mind-set
- its frequent transliteration (instead of translation) of Latin words (“denarius,” [12:15](#); “Praetorium,” [15:16](#))
- its scarcity of OT quotations
- its explanations of Jewish words ([3:17](#); [5:41](#); [7:11](#), [34](#); [14:36](#)) and customs ([7:3](#); [14:12](#); [15:42](#))
- its omission of parables meaningful mainly to Jews, such as the Good Samaritan and the pharisee and tax collector

Purpose

The Christians of Rome had come early to a personal knowledge of Jesus Christ and had had a vibrant testimony for him ([Rom. 1:8](#)), but would soon face persecution. Mark, as a good pastor, provided them a fresh and exciting biographical portrait of Jesus. He presented Jesus as the perfectly obedient Servant of God and showed what it would mean to be his disciple. Christ’s obedience would cost him his life, but his life and message would be vindicated by his resurrection and ascension.

(Source: Willmington’s Bible Handbook)

The Gospel of Luke

Author

Luke, a physician ([Col. 4:14](#)) who traveled with Paul (see [Acts: Author](#)) and was the only one who remained with him during his second imprisonment ([2 Tim. 4:11](#)). Luke knew Philemon personally ([Philem. 1:23-24](#)). He was the only Gentile to write any portion of Scripture. A historian of outstanding literary skill, Luke is widely considered one of the greatest writers of all time. The author’s interest in medical matters ([4:38](#); [14:2](#)) and attention to detail ([3:1-2](#)) lend support to “Dr. Luke’s” authorship (see [exposition](#) on [9:28-36](#) and [exposition](#) on [22:54-62](#)). As Mark wrote his Gospel under Peter’s influence, Luke wrote under Paul’s influence.

Luke also wrote the book of Acts. Together, Luke's two books are longer than all 13 books Paul is known to have written. (Both Luke and Paul have been suggested as possible authors of Hebrews.)

Date

The only clue lies in the probable date of Acts, which is a sequel to Luke (see [Acts: Date](#)). Since Acts ends with Paul still in prison before his first release in A.D. 62, we can assume that Luke was written before that date, probably c. 58–60.

Recipients

Luke addressed both his Gospel and Acts to Theophilus, of whom nothing else is known. Luke called him “most honorable Theophilus” ([1:1](#)), from which we may guess that he was of high social status. Apparently he was also a believer ([1:4](#)). Beyond Theophilus, the Gospel was written with a Greek readership in mind. With their emphasis on the pursuit of excellence, Greeks would have been attracted to Luke's presentation of Christ as an exemplary human being.

Purpose

- To confirm the faith of Theophilus, showing that the faith he had placed in Jesus rested on firm historical ground
- To present Jesus to Gentiles as the Son of Man who, though rejected by Israel, had come to save all humankind

(Source: Willmington's Bible Handbook)

The Gospel of John

Author

Though the text gives no name, the consistent testimony of the early church is that the author is John, the beloved disciple ([21:20-25](#)) and early church leader ([Gal. 2:9](#)). The eyewitness quality of the Gospel confirms this. John also authored the three letters bearing his name and Revelation.

Date

Early church fathers believed it was written in John's old age, probably A.D. 85–95, some 20 years after the Synoptics. John's five books were the last NT books written.

Location and Recipients

Eusebius says John lived in Ephesus after Paul founded the church there. From there he conducted a kind of home-missions ministry. His Gospel and letters were a part of that ministry.

Purpose

While the synoptic Gospels focused on the historical facts of Jesus' life, John interpreted those facts to show that Jesus was, indeed, the Messiah, the Son of God and Savior of the world. He sought to instill faith in his readers ([20:30-31](#)).

Unique Features

- While omitting many of the miracles reported in the synoptic Gospels, John chose seven, apparently to help show that Jesus is the Messiah:

- » changing water to wine ([2:1-11](#))
- » healing the nobleman's son ([4:46-54](#))
- » healing the lame man at Bethesda ([5:1-18](#))
- » feeding 5,000 ([6:5-14](#))
- » walking on water ([6:16-21](#))
- » healing the blind man ([9:1-7](#))
- » raising Lazarus ([11:1-45](#))
- He also recorded seven occasions when Jesus bore witness to his Messiahship:
 - » "I am the bread of life" ([6:35](#)).
 - » "I am the light of the world" ([8:12](#)).
 - » "I am the gate" ([10:7](#)).
 - » "I am the good shepherd" ([10:11](#), [14](#)).
 - » "I am the resurrection and the life" ([11:25](#)).
 - » "I am the way, the truth, and the life" ([14:6](#)).
 - » "I am the true vine" ([15:1](#)).

Comparison with Other Bible Books

The Synoptics (Matthew, Mark, and Luke):

- The Synoptics are primarily historical; John is primarily theological and interpretative, omitting many key historical facts:
 - » Jesus' genealogy and birth
 - » his baptism and temptation
 - » his Galilean and Perea ministries
 - » his healing of demoniacs
 - » his parables
 - » the Transfiguration
 - » the Lord's Supper
 - » Gethsemane
 - » the Ascension
- Instead, John focuses on:
 - » Christ's early ministry in Judea and Jerusalem; while the Synoptics record only one visit to Jerusalem, John mentions four ([2:13-25](#); [5](#); [7:10-10:39](#); [12-19](#)).
 - » his contacts and private conversations with individuals (see [3:1-21](#); [4:1-26](#))
 - » his ministry to the disciples (see [13-17](#))
- John and the Synoptics supplement each other concerning the events of the "Last Supper":
 - » If we had only the Synoptics, we would know nothing of the washing of feet ([13](#)).
 - » If we had only John, we would know nothing of the institution of the Lord's Supper ([Matt. 26:26-30](#)).

(Source: Willmington's Bible Handbook)

The Gospel of John

Authorship

The writer of this gospel is identified in the book only as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” ([21:20](#), [24](#)). He obviously was a Palestinian Jew who was an eyewitness of the events of Christ’s life, for he displays knowledge of Jewish customs ([7:37-39](#); [18:28](#)) and of the land of Palestine ([1:44](#), [46](#); [5:2](#)), and he includes details of an eyewitness ([2:6](#); [13:26](#); [21:8](#), [11](#)). Eliminating the other disciples that belonged to the “inner circle” (because James had been martyred before this time, [Acts 12:1-5](#), and because Peter is named in close association with the disciple whom Jesus loved, [John 13:23-24](#); [20:2-10](#)), one concludes that John was the author. Whether this was the apostle John or a different John (the Elder) is discussed in the [Introduction](#) to 1 John.

John the apostle was the son of Zebedee and Salome and was the younger brother of James. He was a Galilean who apparently came from a fairly well-to-do home ([Mark 15:40-41](#)). Though often painted centuries later as effeminate, his real character was such that he was known as a “Son of Thunder” ([Mark 3:17](#)). He played a leading role in the work of the early church in Jerusalem ([Acts 3:1](#); [8:14](#); [Gal. 2:9](#)). Later he went to Ephesus and for an unknown reason was exiled to the island of Patmos ([Rev. 1:9](#)).

Distinctive Approach

This is the most theological of the Four Gospels. It deals with the nature and person of Christ and the meaning of faith in Him. John’s presentation of Christ as the divine Son of God is seen in the titles given Him in the book: “the Word was God” ([1:1](#)), “the Lamb of God” ([1:29](#)), “the Messiah” ([1:41](#)), “the Son of God” and “the King of Israel” ([1:49](#)), the “Savior of the world” ([4:42](#)), “Lord and ... God” ([20:28](#)). His deity is also asserted in the series of “I am ...” claims ([6:35](#); [8:12](#); [10:7](#), [9](#), [11](#), [14](#); [11:25](#); [14:6](#); [15:1](#), [5](#)). In other “I am” statements Christ made implicit and explicit claim to be the I AM-Yahweh of the Old Testament ([John 4:24](#), [26](#); [8:24](#), [28](#), [58](#); [13:19](#)). These are the strongest claims to deity that Jesus could have made.

The structure and style of the gospel are different from those of the synoptics. It contains no parables, only seven miracles (five of which are not recorded elsewhere), and many personal interviews. The author emphasizes the physical actuality of Jesus’ hunger, thirst, weariness, pain, and death as a defense against the Gnostic denial of Jesus’ true human nature.

Date

Though the gospel of John used to be dated by some extreme critics as being written in the middle of the second century, the discovery of the Rylands papyrus fragment (a few verses from [John 18](#) dated about A.D. 135) forced an earlier date. Several decades would have been required between the original writing of the gospel and its being copied and circulated as far as the Egyptian hinterland where the fragment was found. The gospel was apparently being circulated between 89 and 90, though it may have been written from Ephesus earlier (a pre-70 date has been suggested on the basis of [5:2](#), which may indicate that Jerusalem had not yet been destroyed, but this is far from conclusive).

Discoveries at Qumran have attested to the genuineness of the Jewish background and thought patterns seen in the book.

Contents

John's statement of purpose is clearly spelled out in [20:30-31](#). The gospel is sometimes called The Book of the Seven Signs, since the author chose seven sign-miracles to reveal the person and mission of Jesus: (1) the turning of water into wine ([2:1-11](#)); (2) the cure of the nobleman's son ([4:46-54](#)); (3) the cure of the paralytic ([5:1-18](#)); (4) the feeding of the multitude ([6:6-13](#)); (5) the walking on the water ([6:16-21](#)); (6) the giving of sight to the blind ([9:1-7](#)); and (7) the raising of Lazarus ([11:1-45](#)). Other important themes in the book include the Holy Spirit ([14:26](#); [15:26](#); [16:7-14](#)), Satan and the world ([8:44](#); [12:31](#); [17:15](#)), the Word ([1:1-14](#)), and the new birth ([3:1-12](#)).

Outline of the Gospel of John

- I. **The Preamble: John states His position and reveals important themes, 1:1-18**
- II. **The Presentation of Jesus Christ as the Son of God, 1:19-12:50**
The Use of Seven Supernatural "Signs"
 - turning water into wine ([2:1-11](#))
 - curing the nobleman's son ([4:46-54](#))
 - curing the paralytic ([5:1-18](#))
 - feeding the multitude ([6:6-13](#))
 - walking on the water ([6:16-21](#))
 - giving sight to the man born blind ([9:1-7](#))
 - raising Lazarus ([11:1-45](#)).
- III. **The Private Training of the Disciples by Jesus 13:1-17:26**
- IV. **The Passion of Jesus Christ for Mankind 18:1-19:26**
- V. **The Proof of Jesus Christ by Resurrection 20:1-21:25**
 - **The Climactic Statement by Thomas 20:26-29**
²⁶After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, "**Peace be with you.**" ²⁷Then He said to Thomas, "**Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing.**" ²⁸Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹Jesus said to him, "**Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed.**"
 - **The Purpose Statement of John, the Author 20:30-31**
³⁰Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.

THE SUMMARIZATION FROM HIS LIFE

1. The thirty-six *miracles* of the Savior.
 2. The thirty-eight *parables* of the Savior.
 3. The nineteen *prayers* of the Savior.
 4. The forty-five *predictions* of the Savior.
 5. The sixteen *sermons* of the Savior.
 6. The thirty-six *dialogues* of the Savior.
 7. The sixteen *Old Testament references* of the Savior.
 8. The twenty-two *Old Testament quotes* of the Savior.
 9. The tenfold proof of the *deity* of the Savior.
 10. The thirtyfold proof of the *humanity* of the Savior.
 11. The thirty-seven *names and titles* of the Savior.
 12. The thirty-seven *Old Testament prophecies fulfilled* by the Savior.
 13. The twenty-seven *souls converted* by the Savior.
 14. The fifteen *kinds of sufferings* experienced by the Savior.
 15. The seven *last statements* of the Savior.
 16. The ten *resurrection appearances* of the Savior.
 17. The *political and religious parties* in the days of the Savior.
 18. The *various places visited* by the Savior.
 19. The many *individuals* who met the Savior.
- (Source: Willmington's Guidebook to the Bible)

THE MIRACLES OF THE SAVIOR

1. Changing of water into wine ([Jn. 2:7-9](#)).
2. Healing of the nobleman's son ([Jn. 4:50](#)).
3. Healing of the Capernaum demoniac ([Mk. 1:25](#); [Lk. 4:35](#)).
4. Healing of Peter's mother-in-law ([Mt. 8:15](#); [Mk. 1:31](#); [Lk. 4:39](#)).
5. Catching a great number of fish ([Lk. 5:5, 6](#)).
6. Healing a leper ([Mt. 8:3](#); [Mk. 1:41](#)).
7. Healing a paralytic ([Mt. 9:2, 6, 7](#); [Mk. 2:5, 10-12](#); [Lk. 5:20, 24, 25](#)).
8. Healing a withered hand ([Mt. 12:13](#); [Mk. 3:5](#); [Lk. 6:10](#)).
9. Healing a centurion's servant ([Mt. 8:13](#); [Lk. 7:10](#)).
10. Raising a widow's son ([Lk. 7:14](#)).
11. Calming the stormy sea ([Mt. 8:26](#); [Mk. 4:39](#); [Lk. 8:24](#)).
12. Healing the Gadarene demoniac ([Mt. 8:32](#); [Mk. 5:8](#); [Lk. 8:33](#)).
13. Healing a woman with internal bleeding ([Mt. 9:22](#); [Mk. 5:29](#); [Lk. 8:44](#)).
14. Raising Jairus' daughter ([Mt. 9:25](#); [Mk. 5:41](#); [Lk. 8:54](#)).
15. Healing two blind men ([Mt. 9:29](#)).
16. Healing a dumb demoniac ([Mt. 9:33](#)).
17. Healing of a thirty-eight-year invalid ([Jn. 5:8](#)).
18. Feeding 5,000 men and their families ([Mt. 14:19](#); [Mk. 6:41](#); [Lk. 9:16](#); [Jn. 6:11](#)).
19. Walking on the sea ([Mt. 14:25](#); [Mk. 6:48](#); [Jn. 6:19](#)).
20. Healing a demoniac girl ([Mt. 15:28](#); [Mk. 7:29](#)).

21. Healing a deaf man with a speech impediment ([Mk. 7:34, 35](#)).
 22. Feeding 4,000 men and their families ([Mt. 15:36](#); [Mk. 8:6](#)).
 23. Healing a blind man ([Mk. 8:25](#)).
 24. Healing a man born blind ([Jn. 9:7](#)).
 25. Healing a demoniac boy ([Mt. 17:18](#); [Mk. 9:25](#); [Lk. 9:42](#)).
 26. Catching a fish with a coin in its mouth ([Mt. 17:27](#)).
 27. Healing a blind and dumb demoniac ([Mt. 12:22](#); [Lk. 11:14](#)).
 28. Healing a woman with an eighteen-year infirmity ([Lk. 13:10-17](#)).
 29. Healing a man with dropsy ([Lk. 14:4](#)).
 30. Healing ten lepers ([Lk. 17:11-19](#)).
 31. Raising of Lazarus ([Jn. 11:43, 44](#)).
 32. Healing a blind man ([Mt. 20:34](#); [Lk. 18:42](#)).
 33. Healing a blind man ([Mt. 20:34](#); [Mk. 10:46, 52](#)).
 34. Destroying a fig tree ([Mt. 21:19](#); [Mk. 11:14](#)).
 35. Restoring (healing) a severed ear ([Mt. 26:51](#); [Mk. 14:47](#); [Lk. 22:50, 51](#); [Jn. 18:10](#)).
 36. Catching a great number of fish ([Jn. 21:6](#)).
- (Source: Willmington's Guidebook to the Bible)

THE PARABLES OF THE SAVIOR

1. Two houses in a hurricane ([Mt. 7:24-27](#); [Lk. 6:47-49](#)).
2. Forgiving the fifty and the five-hundred ([Lk. 7:41, 42](#)).
3. Subduing a strong man ([Mk. 3:22-30](#)).
4. The sower, the seed, and the soil ([Mt. 13:1-9, 18-23](#); [Mk. 4:1-20](#); [Lk. 8:4-15](#)).
5. Satan's tares in the Savior's field ([Mt. 13:24-30, 36-43](#)).
6. From scattering to sickling ([Mk. 4:26-29](#)).
7. The mighty mustard seed ([Mt. 13:31, 32](#); [Mk. 4:30-32](#); [Lk. 13:18, 19](#)).
8. The cook's leaven and the kingdom of heaven ([Mt. 13:33](#); [Lk. 13:20, 21](#)).
9. Finding a fortune in a field ([Mt. 13:44](#)).
10. The price of a pearl ([Mt. 13:45, 46](#)).
11. Sorting out a sea catch ([Mt. 13:47-50](#)).
12. A trained man and his treasure ([Mt. 13:52](#)).
13. A rent cloth and a ruptured container ([Mt. 9:16, 17](#); [Mk. 2:21, 22](#); [Lk. 5:36-39](#)).
14. A generation of gripers ([Mt. 11:16-19](#); [Lk. 7:31-35](#)).
15. The forgiven who wouldn't forgive ([Mt. 18:23-35](#)).
16. How to know your neighbor ([Lk. 10:25-37](#)).
17. Seven spirits and a swept house ([Mt. 12:43-45](#); [Lk. 11:24-26](#)).
18. A fool in a fix ([Lk. 12:16-21](#)).
19. Keep the home fires burning ([Lk. 12:32-40](#); [Mt. 24:43, 44](#)).
20. A sinning servant and a returning ruler ([Mt. 24:45-51](#); [Lk. 12:42-48](#)).
21. A fruitless fig tree ([Lk. 13:6-9](#)).
22. Choosing the least at a wedding feast ([Lk. 14:7-11](#)).
23. Two fools and a henpecked husband ([Lk. 14:15-24](#)).
24. A missing sheep, the misplaced silver and a miserable son ([Lk. 15:1-32](#)).

25. The stewings of a steward ([Lk. 16:1-13](#)).
 26. When Hades petitioned paradise ([Lk. 16:19-31](#)).
 27. When our best is but the least ([Lk. 17:7-10](#)).
 28. A widow and a weary judge ([Lk. 18:1-8](#)).
 29. A haughty Pharisee and a humble Publican ([Lk. 18:9-14](#)).
 30. When the last was first and the first was last ([Mt. 20:1-16](#)).
 31. Three stewards and their silver ([Lk. 19:11-27](#)).
 32. Two sons who changed their minds ([Mt. 21:28-32](#)).
 33. The vicious vine keepers ([Mt. 21:33-46](#); [Mk. 12:1-12](#); [Lk. 21:9-19](#)).
 34. A wedding guest with no wedding garment ([Mt. 22:1-14](#)).
 35. The fig tree and the future ([Mt. 24:32-35](#); [Mk. 13:28-31](#); [Lk. 21:29-33](#)).
 36. Five lamps that went out ([Mt. 25:1-13](#)).
 37. Three stewards and their talents ([Mt. 25:14-30](#)).
 38. Separating the sheep from the goats ([Mt. 25:31-46](#)).
- (Source: Willmington's Guidebook to the Bible)