

Gospel Chronology #0: Introduction to the Gospels and the Gospel Writers

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

This question may be broken down further as follows:

- a. Why did God do it/allow it?
- b. Why did He record it for our study?

“.... To be permitted to have a view of God is the highest privilege accorded to man. This privilege should be prized above all earthly distinction or honor.”—Ellen G. White, *The Signs of the Times*,* June 16, 1898, par. 15.†

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1. [Introduction to the Gospels:] Let us look at the background for each of the four Gospels.

The Gospel of Matthew

2. [Introduction to the Gospels:] ***Who was Matthew? Why did he write about Jesus? If Matthew was a Jew writing primarily to Jews, why did he write in Greek? Or, did he?***

Levi Matthew, often called Matthew, was one of the twelve disciples. He was the son of Alphaeus. His father probably was not the Alphaeus that was the father of James. (Mark 3:18) Matthew was called by Jesus to be a disciple after he worked for some time as a tax collector or “publican.” Generally, publicans were Jews who agreed to cooperate with the Romans to collect the taxes for Caesar, or Herod Antipas, who was the ruler of Galilee at that time. With the permission of Rome, many tax collectors collected considerably more than Rome required and pocketed the difference. They were regarded as traitors by the Jews. Being a tax collector, Matthew probably was relatively-well educated and spoke Greek as well as his native Aramaic.

Matthew became a follower of Jesus during the Galilean ministry of Jesus, less than two years before the crucifixion. Because he had been a tax collector, he was not looked upon favorably by the Jews, including the disciples, when Jesus called him to be one of His disciples. Furthermore, Matthew had been one of the tax collectors working in the city of Capernaum, the hometown of Peter and Andrew. It must have been very hard for them to accept this “outcast” from their society as an associate! Matthew may have been fairly well-off financially. At least, he had enough money to throw a large banquet for Jesus. (See Matthew 9:9-13; Mark 2:13-17; Luke 5:27-32.) It appears that after Jesus called Levi Matthew, many of society’s “outcasts” began to feel much more comfortable around Jesus! We know very little about Matthew’s life after the ascension of Jesus. However, his book seems to imply that he worked and wrote his Gospel primarily for Jews. Early in the 2nd

century, Papias referred to Matthew as the collector of the “oracles” of Jesus. Shortly thereafter, this Gospel as a whole was attributed to Matthew.

[*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*:] Later traditions about Matthew are mixed and unreliable. Eusebius said only that Matthew first preached to “the Hebrews” and then to “others” (*Historia Ecclesiastica* iii.24.6), the latter being amplified in later sources to include residents of such places as Ethiopia, Persia, Parthia, Macedonia, and Syria. Clement of Alexandria provided the interesting note that “the apostle Matthew partook of seeds, and nuts, and vegetables, without flesh” (*Paedagogus* ii.1). [Apparently, he was a vegetarian. However, apparently, he ate fish with Jesus and the other disciples. So, he likely was a pescatarian.] The traditions about Matthew’s death are contradictory. According to some, Matthew was a martyr for his faith, although the place and means of his martyrdom vary considerably in different reports. Part of the confusion in these later traditions may be due to the similarity of the names Matthew and Matthias. Probably more reliable is the conclusion that Matthew died a normal death, as implied by Heracleon (recorded by Clement of Alexandria in *Stromata* iv.9).—*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*,* vol. 3, 280.†§

3. [Introduction to the Gospels:] ***Matthew referred to many Old Testament inferences or parallels as well as some “prophecies” about the Messiah and showed their fulfillment in Jesus. How do you explain the fact that many of those prophecies had distinctly different meanings when they were originally given and recorded in the Old Testament? (See Isaiah 7:14; Jeremiah 31:15; Hosea 11:1. Compare Matthew 1:23; 2:15; 2:18.) Where did Matthew get the prophecy, “He will be called a Nazarene”? (Matthew 2:23)***

Prophecy	Old Testament Meaning	New Testament Meaning
Isaiah 7:14	In the context of Isaiah 7:1-9:6, the original prophecy referred to Isaiah’s son, Maher-shalal-hashbaz, being born to a young woman and referred to the lifting of the siege by Kings Rezin and Pekah before Isaiah’s son was old enough to say “mama” or “dada.”	In Matthew 1:21, the verse clearly referred to the virgin birth of Jesus. It is clear that this was the long-term meaning of the prophecy of Isaiah 9:6. Matthew re-interpreted Isaiah.
Micah 5:2	A future leader will be born in Bethlehem.	The Messiah was indeed born in Bethlehem as a descendant of David.
Jeremiah 31:15	In the original context, this referred to the weeping of the people taken into Babylonian	Matthew 2:18. The overwhelming grief that must have struck the mothers of the area when all their male children were killed was

	captivity. (See Jeremiah 31:16-17.)	comparable to the weeping of those going into captivity.
Hosea 11:1	Hosea was reviewing the history of ancient Israel and was clearly referring to their exodus from Egypt.	Matthew 2:15. Matthew noted the very interesting parallel between the personal life story of Jesus and the history of Israel as a nation.
Matthew 2:23: "Nazarene"	There is no equivalent prophecy in the Old Testament Scriptures that we have today or in any of the Old Testament Apocrypha or pseudepigrapha that is still in existence.	Matthew 2:23 (<i>Good News Bible-TEV</i> *): He ... made his home in a town called Nazareth. And so what the prophets had said came true: "He will be called a Nazarene."
Isaiah 9:1-2	This was a prophecy of the future King.	Matthew 4:14. Jesus began His ministry in Galilee.
Isaiah 53:4	Jews regard this as a prophecy about the sufferings of the Jewish people.	In Matthew 8:17, Matthew took this to refer to the work of Jesus, healing of the sick and suffering in His day.
Isaiah 42:1-4	This was a prophecy about the future Messiah.	Matthew 12:18-21 applied this to the life of Christ.
Psalms 78:2	This was a poem by Asaph to the people of Israel.	Matthew 13:35. Matthew applied this psalm to the parables of Jesus.
Zechariah 11:12-13; Jeremiah 18:2-12; 19:1-15; 32:6-9	This was primarily an experience that happened to Zechariah. There are some possible similarities in Jeremiah.	Matthew 27:9-10. This prophecy was a mixture of ideas coming from Zechariah and Jeremiah. Matthew noted how they all seemed to fit the life of Christ.
Psalms 22:1,7-8,18; Psalms 69:21	Psalms 22 was a poem about a terrible experience that David had; but, there are many interesting parallels in the death of Jesus.	Matthew 27:35,39,43,46 all have parallels in Psalm 22. However, it is clear from verses like Psalm 69:22-28 that these Old Testament passages had a different primary application in the original setting!

4. [Introduction to the Gospels:] It should be apparent from the table above that some of these passages were originally meant to refer to the future Messiah while others are simply interesting parallels.
5. [Introduction to the Gospels:] In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus is portrayed as a King who came to "rescue" His people and set up His kingdom. When He did, His own people rejected Him. They did not want the kind of kingdom that He offered. They wanted a Messiah who would help them to conquer the Romans and allow them to rule the world! While some Gentiles exhibited enormous faith and went to great effort and expense to see Jesus, His

own people, even when confronted with wonderful miracles performed by Jesus, accused Him of working by the power of the prince of demons! (See Matthew 2:1-12; 8:5-13; 15:21-28; 12:24.)

The Gospel of Mark

6. [Introduction to the Gospels:] ***Who was Mark? Why did he write a “Gospel”? Where did he get his information? What picture of God would you have if you had only Mark? Did Mark know Jesus? Peter? Paul? One of the early church fathers, Papias, suggested that Mark wrote “Peter’s Gospel.” Do we have any evidence from the New Testament to support the idea that the Gospel of Mark is really “Peter’s Gospel”? How do you think Peter did that? (1 Peter 5:13)***

2 Peter 1:12-15: ¹²So I will always remind you of these things.... ¹⁵And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things.—*New International Version*.*

7. [Introduction to the Gospels:] ***Who was the youth in Mark 14:51-52? Could it have been Mark?***
8. [Introduction to the Gospels:] ***How do you feel about the fact that an estimated ninety percent of Mark is apparently copied in either Matthew or Luke? If there were so many things to write about in the life of Christ that “if every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written,” (John 21:25) why is there so much repetition and even apparent copying in the three “synoptic” Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke?***
9. [Introduction to the Gospels:] The Gospel writers each had a specific reason for writing what they did. Each wrote to a different audience. They wrote on scrolls or perhaps on early papyrus sheets. They had never seen a book like the ones that we take for granted. They expected Jesus to return within a short time, almost immediately, and certainly during their lifetimes. They could not have imagined that almost two thousand years later, we would be analyzing their writings by computer to see if they “borrowed” from each other! Furthermore, **since the Holy Spirit is the primary “Author” of each of these documents, doesn’t He have the right to repeat whatever He chooses to repeat when writing to different groups?**
10. [Introduction to the Gospels:] The next 3 pages are taken from *The Daily Study Bible* by William Barclay, 1958 print edition.

[From Barclay’s *The Daily Study Bible*:] ***The Earliest Gospel***

When we examine the matter more closely we begin to see that there is every reason for believing that **Mark must have been the first of the gospels to be written, and that the other two [synoptic gospels], Matthew and Luke, are using Mark as a basis.** Mark can be divided into 105 sections. Of these sections 93 occur in *Matthew* and 81 in *Luke*. **Of Mark’s 105 sections there are only 4 which do not occur either in Matthew or in Luke.** Mark has 661

verses: *Matthew* has 1068 verses: *Luke* has 1149 verses. *Matthew* reproduces no fewer than 606 of *Mark's* verses; and *Luke* reproduces 320. Of the 55 verses of *Mark* which *Matthew* does not reproduce *Luke* reproduces 31; **so there are only 24 verses in the whole of *Mark* which are not reproduced somewhere in *Matthew* or *Luke*. It is not only the substance of the verses which is reproduced; the very words are reproduced.** *Matthew* uses 51 per cent of *Mark's* words; and *Luke* uses 53 per cent.

Still further, both *Matthew* and *Luke* as a general rule follow *Mark's* order of events. Occasionally either *Matthew* or *Luke* differs from *Mark* as to the order of events; but they never in any case *both* differ against him; always at least one of them follows *Mark's* order of events.

Improvements on Mark

Since *Matthew* and *Luke* are both much longer than *Mark*, it might just possibly be suggested that *Mark* is a summary of *Matthew* and *Luke*; but there is one other set of facts which show that *Mark* is earlier. **It is the custom of *Matthew* and *Luke* to improve and to polish *Mark***, if we may put it so. Let us take some instances of that. **Sometimes *Mark* seems to limit the power of Jesus**; at least an ill-disposed critic might try to prove that he was doing so. Let us take three passages which are all accounts of the same incident:

Mark 1: 34: [Note that Barclay's format for a Bible reference is chapter, followed by a colon, then a space, and then the verse number.] And He healed *many* that were sick with divers diseases, and cast out *many* devils;

Matthew 8: 16: And He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed *all* that were sick;

Luke 4: 40: And He laid hands on *everyone* [*sic*] of them, and healed them.

Let us take other [*sic*] three similar examples:

Mark 3: 8 [*sic*] [actually *Mark* 3:10]: For He had healed *many*;

Matthew 12: 15: And He healed them *all*;

Luke 6: 19: He healed them *all*.

***Matthew* and *Luke* both change *Mark's* *many* into *all* so that there may be no suggestion of any limitation of the power of Jesus Christ.**

There is a very similar change in the account of the events of Jesus' visit to Nazareth. Let us compare the account of *Mark* and of *Matthew*.

Mark 6: 5, 6: And *He could there do* no mighty work . . . and He marvelled [*sic*-British spelling] because of their unbelief;

Matthew 13: 57 [*sic*] [actually *Matthew* 13:58]: And *He did not* many mighty works there, because of their unbelief.

Matthew shrinks from saying that Jesus *could not* do any mighty works; and changes the form of the expression so that there may be no possibility of any limitation of the power of Jesus.

Sometimes **Matthew** and **Luke** leave out little touches in **Mark** in case they could be taken to belittle Jesus. **Matthew** and **Luke** omit three statements in **Mark**:

Mark 3: 5: When He had looked round on them *with anger, being grieved* at the hardness of their hearts;

Mark 3: 21: And when His friends heard it, they went out to lay hold on Him: for they said, *He is beside Himself*;

Mark 10: 14: He was *moved with indignation*.

Matthew and **Luke** hesitate to attribute human emotions of anger and grief to Jesus, and shudder to think that anyone should even have suggested that Jesus was mad.

Sometimes **Matthew** and **Luke** slightly alter things in **Mark** in order to get rid of statements which might seem to show the apostles in a bad light. We take but one instance, from the occasion on which James and John sought to ensure themselves of the highest places in the coming Kingdom. Let us compare the introduction to that story in **Mark** and in **Matthew**:

Mark 10: 35: And there came near unto him *James and John*, the sons of Zebedee, saying unto him . . . ;

Matthew 20: 20: There came to Him *the mother of the sons of Zebedee* with her two sons, worshipping [*sic*-British spelling] Him, and asking a certain thing of Him.

Matthew hesitates to ascribe motives of ambition directly to the two apostles, and so he ascribes them to their mother.

All this makes it clear that Mark is the earliest of the gospels. Mark gives a simple, vivid, direct narrative; but Matthew and Luke have already begun to be affected by doctrinal and theological considerations which make them much more careful of what they say.

The Teaching of Jesus

We have seen that **Matthew** has 1068 verses; and that **Luke** has 1149 verses; and that between them they reproduce 582 of **Mark's** verses. That means that **in Matthew and Luke there is much more material than Mark contains and supplies**. When we examine that material we find that more than 200 verses of it are almost identical. For instance, such passages as Luke 6: 41, 42 and Matthew 7: 3, 5; Luke 10: 21, 22 and Matthew 11: 25-27; Luke 3: 7-9 and Matthew 3: 7-10 are almost identically the same. But here we notice a difference. The material which **Matthew** and **Luke** drew from **Mark** was almost

entirely material dealing with the events of Jesus' life; but **the 200 common verses which *Matthew* and *Luke* have over and above that is entirely composed of the teaching of Jesus**; these verses tell us, not so much what Jesus *did*, as what Jesus *said*. Clearly in these 200 verses *Matthew* and *Luke* are drawing from **a common source-book of the teachings of Jesus**. That book does not now exist; but to it scholars have given the letter **Q** which stands for *Quelle*, which is the German word for *source*. In its day it must have been an extraordinarily important book, for it was the first handbook of the teaching of Jesus.—Barclay, William. Article: Introduction to the Gospel According to Saint Matthew. *The Gospel of MATTHEW*, vol. 1. *The Daily Study Bible*. 2nd ed. Edinburgh, Scotland: The Saint Andrew Press; 1958: pg xvii-xxi.^{†‡§}

11. [Introduction to the Gospels:] Are you convinced by Barclay's discussion that Mark was the earliest Gospel written? Are you convinced that Matthew and Luke borrowed from Mark or from a common source? Do Matthew's and Luke's Gospels make Jesus and His disciples seem more "saintly"?
12. [Introduction to the Gospels:] Conservative Christians scholars all agree that the Gospel of Mark was written by John Mark, the son of Mary, (Acts 12:12) and the cousin of Barnabas. (Colossians 4:10) He was a young man who grew up in Jerusalem. His first name was John. (See Acts 13:5,13; Colossians 4:10; Philemon 24; 1 Peter 5:13.) It is likely that the upper room where Jesus spent His last night with the disciples was in the home of Mark's parents. (See Matthew 26:18; Mark 14:51; Luke 22:12; Acts 1:13.) For some time after the crucifixion, their home served as headquarters for the early church and was the place where the disciples stayed when in Jerusalem. (See John 20:19; Acts 1:13-14; 12:12.) John Mark accompanied Paul and Barnabas on the first part of their first missionary journey. However, he went home before its end. (Acts 13:5,13) John Mark later worked with Peter and Paul. (1 Peter 5:13; Colossians 4:10; 2 Timothy 4:11)

[SDA Bible Commentary:] Papias, bishop of the city of Hierapolis, about 10 mi. distant from Colossae and Laodicea in Asia Minor, is the first known writer who speaks of Mark as the author of this Gospel. In his *Interpretations*, as quoted in Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History* iii. 39. 15; Loeb ed., vol. 1, p. 297), he states:

“ ‘And the Presbyter [most probably the presbyter John] used to say this, **“Mark became Peter's interpreter and wrote accurately all that he remembered**, not, indeed, in order, of the things said or done by the Lord. For he had not heard the Lord, nor had he followed him, but later on, as I said, followed Peter, who used to give teaching as necessity demanded but not making, as it were, an arrangement of the Lord's oracles, so that Mark did nothing wrong in thus writing down single points as he remembered them. For to one thing, he gave attention, to

leave out nothing of what he had heard and to make no false statements in them.” ’ ’ ”

This statement is in harmony with Peter’s reference to Mark as “my son” (1 Peter 5:13).—Introduction [to “The Gospel According to St. Mark”]. Nichol, F. D. (Ed.), *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 5 (page 563-564). Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association (1956).†‡Ω§

13. [Introduction to the Gospels:] **Most scholars agree that Mark was the first Gospel written.** It was probably written **around A.D. 65**, near the time of Peter’s death in Rome. **Thus, the Gospels were written after many of the other books of the New Testament were written including the books by Paul.**
14. [Introduction to the Gospels:] Evidence that Peter was the main source of the Gospel of Mark is found in the book itself. Peter, a fisherman who grew up in Galilee, was the only Gospel writer to mention gathering up the extra *fish* left over after feeding the five thousand men—besides women and children. (Mark 6:43) He mentioned the seating of the groups in more detail than the other writers. (Mark 6:39-40) The Gospel of Mark describes Peter’s denial at the trial of Jesus in most detail. (See Mark 14:27-31; 66-72. Compare Matthew 26:34,69-75; Luke 22:34,54-62; John 13:38; 18:15-18,25-27.) Simon Peter and his friends were the ones who first went looking for Jesus after His miraculous day in Capernaum. (Mark 1:36) Peter remembered in detail the healing of the leper, (Mark 1:40) and the lowering of the paralyzed man through the roof of Peter’s house. (Mark 2:1-4; Luke 5:17-26) He remembered the actual appearance of Jesus at the healing on the Sabbath of the man with the paralyzed hand. (Mark 3:5) He remembered the details of dealing with the demoniac of Gergasa. (Mark 5:4-6) Only Mark mentioned the healing of the deaf and dumb man using saliva, mentioning the actual command Jesus gave in Aramaic—“Ephphatha”—Be opened! (Mark 7:32-35) He mentioned that it was the next day when Peter questioned Jesus about the withered fig tree. (Mark 11:20-21)
15. [Introduction to the Gospels:] Mark’s Gospel was widely known among Christians as early as A.D. 150. The fact that Mark is the shortest Gospel and yet has many intimate details of the stories, suggests that Mark wrote first and that the others borrowed from him. There are some passages that Matthew and Luke share that are not in Mark, and it has been hypothesized that there was another “source” (*Quelle* in German) from which Matthew and Luke also borrowed.
16. [Introduction to the Gospels:] Evidence that Mark was probably focusing on a Roman audience is the fact that a number of words he used for soldiers and officials are the Latin words which he transliterated into Greek rather than using the normal Greek words for those individuals. Mark also explained facts which would be unfamiliar to Romans such as Jewish rituals, coinage, pharisaical customs, the Passover, and certain Aramaic words. (See Mark 5:41; 7:3-4,34; 12:12; 14:12; 15:34.)

The Gospel of Luke

17. [Introduction to the Gospels:] ***Who was the author of Luke and Acts? What was his profession? Was he a Jew? Did he write primarily for Jews? Who was Theophilus? When and from whom did Luke first learn of Jesus? (Acts 16:6-10) Was Luke a first-hand witness of the events about which he wrote? (Luke 1:2-3) Where did he get his information? What picture of God would you have if you had only Luke? Do you think Luke received any first-hand, direct revelation that he included in this book? Where did he do his research? Why would this prosperous Greek physician apparently suddenly give up everything and cast his lot with that little-known group of Jewish “believers”?***
18. [Introduction to the Gospels:] Consider this introduction to Luke’s Gospel in the *SDA Bible Commentary*.
- [SDA Bible Commentary:] The ancient and unanimous consensus of Christian tradition points to Luke as the author of the Gospel that bears his name. In his *Ecclesiastical History* (iii. 4. 6) Eusebius (died c. 340) specifically designates Luke as the author of this Gospel. A century earlier Tertullian (died c. 230) spoke of Paul as the “illuminator” of Luke, that is, the one who encouraged Luke and provided him with much of the information contained in Luke’s writings. About the year A.D. 185 Irenaeus wrote: “Luke, the follower of Paul, put in a book the gospel that was preached by him.” The famous Muratorian Fragment, a portion of a document written toward the close of the 2d [sic] century, agrees with Irenaeus, stating that the third Gospel was written by Luke the physician, a companion of Paul. Early tradition thus unanimously favors Luke as the author of the Gospel that bears his name. There is no evidence that points to anyone other than Luke as the author.—Introduction [to “The Gospel According to St. Luke”]. F. D. Nichol (Ed.), *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 5 (page 663). Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association (1956).^{‡§}
19. [Introduction to the Gospels:] Luke was apparently a Greek physician whom Paul met at Troas. (See Acts 16:6-10.) Luke joined Paul and his other companions when they first went to Greece and began the work in Europe. He continued to work with Paul until almost the end of Paul’s life. (See 1 Timothy 4:11.) **Luke and Paul each wrote about the same amount of material. Together, they wrote most of the New Testament.** Colossians 4:10-14 suggest that Luke was not a Jew but rather that he was a Greek physician. Eusebius says that Luke was from Antioch. Tradition suggests that Luke was martyred in Greece by being crucified on a live olive tree.
20. [Introduction to the Gospels:] The book of Luke was apparently written before A.D. 62 as suggested by the following reasons. The book of Luke was apparently written before Acts, and Acts seems to end with Paul’s early imprisonment at Rome in about A.D. 61 or 62.
21. [Introduction to the Gospels:] No doubt, Luke was aware of many oral stories about the life

of Jesus, and he tried to determine which of those stories were true. Because Luke probably spoke to many of the less prominent individuals involved in the life of Jesus in one way or another, he mentioned many more names of those people—particularly the women—than did the other Gospel writers.

22. [Introduction to the Gospels:] We know nothing at all about Theophilus except what we read in the introductions to Luke and Acts. *Theophilus* means “friend of God” and could possibly be a term used generically for fellow-Christians. However, in Luke 1:3, Luke seemed to be speaking to a specific person. Luke probably began collecting his material and stories about the life of Christ while Paul was in prison in Caesarea (c. A.D. 58-60). Paul likely told him of the basic outline of events in the life of Christ. During Luke’s time at Caesarea, it is very likely that Luke made trips throughout Palestine and talked to many of the original eyewitnesses to those events. Probably later, while they were both working in Rome, Luke added to his Gospel portions of Mark’s description of the life of Christ. They were writing to different audiences and for different reasons and probably never thought that people would raise the question of why they repeated so much of the same information.
23. [Introduction to the Gospels:] Luke became one of the most prominent workers in the Christian church partially because of his association with Paul. Certainly, the Holy Spirit recognized his talents and worked with him in his writing and missionary work. We must assume that Luke was persuaded by Paul of the truth of Jesus Christ, His life, and His work. Like the disciples being called to follow Jesus, Luke was asked to go along with Paul and his companions.
24. [Introduction to the Gospels:] ***Historically, Luke’s writings were not accepted by some of the early Christians for many years. Can you think of any reason why that might have been? How many “Gospels” (accounts of the life of Christ) were written before Luke was written? Was Luke thinking of Matthew and Mark only when he said “many”? (Luke 1:1) Could you name some others? Did Luke mention any names in his Gospel that other writers did not mention?***
25. [Introduction to the Gospels:] ***Luke recorded several miracles, parables, and events including the raising from the dead of the son of the widow of Nain which are not recorded in any other Gospel. Why did he record events with Samaritans? Gentiles? Women? Children? And other outcasts? Do you recognize any pattern in the following group of stories? Where did Luke learn about them?***
1. The raising of the widow of Nain’s son (Luke 7:11-17) [Gospel Chronology #51]
 2. The naming of the women who followed Jesus (Luke 8:1-3) [Gospel Chronology #50]
 3. The sending out of the seventy-two (Luke 10:1-12,17-20) [Gospel Chronology #90]
 4. The parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) [Gospel Chronology #91]
 5. Mary sitting at Jesus’s feet while Martha served (Luke 10:38-42) [Gospel Chronology #92]
 6. The parable of the rich fool (Luke 12:13-21) [Gospel Chronology #98]

7. The healing of the crippled woman (Luke 13:10-17) [Gospel Chronology #101]
8. Healing the man with swollen arms and legs (Luke 14:1-6) [Gospel Chronology #104]
9. The lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son (Luke 15) [Gospel Chronology #107, #108, #109]
10. The rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) [Gospel Chronology #111]
11. Healing the ten lepers (Luke 17:11-19) [Gospel Chronology #115]
12. The parable of the widow and the judge (Luke 18:1-8) [Gospel Chronology #117]
13. The Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:9-24) [Gospel Chronology #118]
14. The story of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10) [Gospel Chronology #126]
15. Jesus before Herod (Luke 23:6-12) [Gospel Chronology #167]
16. The healing of Malchus's ear (Luke 22:51) [Gospel Chronology #161]
17. The details of the walk to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35) [Gospel Chronology #173]
26. [Introduction to the Gospels:] Notice that Luke, being a Gentile, did not have the same prejudices against Samaritans that the Jew had. He was the only one that spoke well about any Samaritan at all except for the encounter with the woman of Sychar/Samaria as recorded in John 4, and John's Gospel was written many years later and after the conquest of Jerusalem. He is the one who recorded the story of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) and the Samaritan leper who was the only one to return and thank Jesus. (Luke 17:11-19) The Jewish attitude toward Samaritans is perhaps best represented by the question by the disciples recorded in Luke 9:52! They were ready to call down fire on the Samaritans!
27. [Introduction to the Gospels:] Luke was a physician, and he recorded the largest number of miracles of healings. He wrote a lot about the common people who were touched by the life of Jesus. It seems likely that he investigated many of those stories himself. No doubt, being a scientist, he was impressed by the experience on the road to Emmaus with its appeal to the evidence in support of the claims Jesus made about Himself. Luke also mentioned Herod's encounter with Jesus, perhaps because many people knew the name of Herod, and it would give credibility to the whole account.
28. [Introduction to the Gospels:] Luke was the one Gospel writer who recorded much of what happened on Jesus's last major journey to Jerusalem—starting in Galilee (Luke 9:51-19:27) and traveling through Samaria, Decapolis, Perea, and finally, through Judea to Jerusalem.
29. [Introduction to the Gospels:] The Jews of Galilee often traveled through Perea on the east side (the "other side") of the Jordan River down to Jericho and then up to Jerusalem to avoid traveling through Samaria even though it would have been much shorter for many of them to go through Samaria.
30. [Introduction to the Gospels:] **Luke wrote very favorably about women and even of marriage**, and those were not popular ideas in the early days of Christianity. There were many early Christians who favored the ascetic ideas that later led to the development of monasteries and nunneries. The polytheistic, pagan Greeks believed that the soul of a

person was immortal and dwelt only temporarily in the human body on this earth. Because of the influence of the Stoics and others, they developed the idea that denying the body was a noble thing to do. Later, putting these ideas together, **they generally believed that anything that was good for the soul was probably bad for the body and vice versa.** Thus, it was believed that “real Christians” would deny themselves any “bodily pleasure” that might distract them from their focus on the kingdom of God. This is where the idea of celibacy was born.

31. [Introduction to the Gospels:] **As a result of Luke’s favorable attitude toward women and marriage, several groups of early Christians did not want to accept his Gospel as an authentic part of the New Testament.** Instead, they substituted five apocryphal “gospels” (the five Ebionite gospels found in the *New Testament Apocrypha* which few people today have even heard of) that agreed more with their own theology. These other “gospels” speak of the apostles traveling around the Mediterranean area separating husbands and wives and encouraging young people to dedicate themselves to God instead of marrying. They also speak of the apostles performing some fantastic miracles such as actually making a camel go through the eye of a needle (*Acts of Peter and Andrew* vv. 13-22, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, translated by M. R. James, pp. 458,459) in order to convince some people to become Christians and to give their money to the church!
32. [Introduction to the Gospels:] These are probably just some of the reasons that conservative early Christians were reluctant to accept Luke as a part of Scripture.
33. [Introduction to the Gospels:] Luke also wrote kindly about **tax collectors!** (Luke 18:9-24; 19:1-10) Luke is the one Gospel writer who spoke out regularly against **the folly of riches.** (Luke 1:53; 6:20-26; 8:14; 12:13-21; 14:7-14; 16:1-31; 21:1-4; compare 1 Timothy 6:6-10,17; James 1:10,11; 2:5,6; 5:1-6)
34. [Introduction to the Gospels:] Luke gives us a marvelous picture of God through the life and death of Christ. We would lose so much without it. What parts of Luke’s Gospel are you most thankful for? What has he taught us about God?

The Gospel of John

35. [Introduction to the Gospels:] ***What picture of God would you have if you had only the Gospel of John? Why is John’s Gospel so much different from the others? Why did the other Gospel writers leave out some of the amazing stories in John? When and why did John write his Gospel? (John 20:30-31) Why did he wait so long? What was happening in the Christian church at the time that may have led to his writing? (1 John 4:1-3; 2 John 7)***
36. The name John (*Ioannes* in Greek) comes from *Yehochanan* or *Yochanan* meaning “Jehovah (*YAHWEH*) is gracious.” Nowhere in his Gospel does John mention his own name. He refers to himself as “this disciple” (John 21:23), the “disciple, whom Jesus loved” (John 21:20), and even “the disciple who spoke of these things, the one who also wrote them

down” (John 21:24). Conservative scholars agree that he also wrote the three letters bearing his name (1 John, 2 John, and 3 John) and the book of Revelation.

37. A small papyrus document known as **Rylands Papyrus 457** and commonly designated as **P⁵²** was found in a small rural town in Egypt. It was written about A.D. 125 and contains John 18:31-33 on one side and John 18:37-38 on the other side. **It is perhaps the earliest existing copy of any biblical document.** Together with other archaeological evidence, it supports the fact that this book was written about A.D. 90 by the Apostle John himself.
38. John was often referred to as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” or “the beloved disciple” because Jesus “kept on loving him” (the meaning of the Greek expression). John was closer to Jesus than any of the other disciples, and John also was younger in age. John’s childhood home was in Bethsaida on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee. John the Baptist was a different person.
39. John wrote his Gospel about 30 years after the others wrote theirs. At that time, he was the only disciple still living, and Jerusalem had been destroyed by the Romans. **Three grave dangers seemed to be threatening the Christian church at the time he wrote:** 1) **A decreasing commitment to Christianity**, even among church members described in Revelation 2:4 as “a loss of the first love;” 2) **Heresies, especially gnosticism;** and 3) **Persecution.**

[SDA Bible Commentary:] **Christian Gnostic thought** revolved around the concept that, in essence, good and evil are to be identified with spirit and matter, respectively. Those men in whose souls resides a spark of the heavenly light are said to be prisoners in this world of matter. Salvation consists in the knowledge of how to escape from the realm of matter into the realm of spirit. **Gnosticism denied the true incarnation of Christ**, holding that the human form men thought they saw, was an apparition. The divine Christ was supposed to have entered into the human Jesus at His baptism, and departed prior to His death on the cross.—Introduction [to “The Gospel According to St. John”]. Nichol, F. D. (Ed.), *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 5 (page 893). Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association (1956).^{†‡}

40. [Introduction to the Gospels:] Most of the Gospel of John deals with **incidents that took place in Jerusalem or in the nearby parts of Judea and involved the Jewish leaders.** The other Gospels deal primarily with His ministry in Galilee. Thus, John is quite different from the others. He included several long discussions with the Pharisees which occurred in the temple at Jerusalem. **John’s primary goal was to tell us about God.** He stated in no uncertain terms that Jesus was One with the Father. (See John 10:30; 14:9; 17:21.) Twenty-six times he quoted Jesus as saying that the Father had sent Him.

[Barclay’s *Daily Study Bible*:] Right at the beginning of it [John 1:19-28] we come upon a characteristic of the Fourth Gospel. It is emissaries of the *Jews* who come to cross-question John. **The word *Jews* (*Ioudaioi*) occurs in the**

Fourth Gospel no fewer than seventy times; and always the Jews are the opposition. They are the people who have set themselves against Jesus. The mention of the *Jews* brings the opposition thus early upon the stage. **The Fourth Gospel is two things. First, as we have seen, it is the exhibition of God in Jesus Christ. But, second, it is equally the story of the rejection of Jesus Christ by the Jews.** The gospel is at one and the same time the story of God's offer and man's refusal, the story of God's love and man's sin, the story of Jesus Christ's invitation and man's rejection of it. **The Fourth Gospel is the gospel in which love and warning are uniquely and vividly combined.**—Barclay, William. Article: The Witness of John [Article for John 1:19-28]. *The Gospel of JOHN*, vol. 1. In *The Daily Study Bible*. 2nd ed. Edinburgh, Scotland: The Saint Andrew Press; 1956: pg 58.^{†‡§}

41. [Introduction to the Gospels:] ***Matthew and Luke talk about Jesus's human heritage, but Mark does not discuss the issue. What does John say about where Jesus came from? (See John 1:1-3.)***

At the very beginning of his Gospel, John stated in clear terms that Jesus was *H O L O G O S*—*the Word*, a term he used to mean that Jesus was the living expression of the mind, will, and character of God. The Gospel of John makes it clear that Jesus existed from eternity with the Father. (John 1:1-3) Thus, John goes back before the human story of Jesus to discuss His true identity as the eternal, immortal God who created all things. (See John 1:3; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:1-6.)

42. [Introduction to the Gospels:] ***Finally, after working with the descendants of Abraham for almost 2000 years, God had a people who did not worship idols, were Sabbathkeepers, tithe-payers, health-reformers, and Bible students. They were "adventists," waiting for the coming of the Messiah. However, when He came to His "home," His "family" did not receive Him. (John 1:11) Could that happen again? Could it happen to us? What do you suppose this said to the universe? If God knew in advance that this would happen, what was He waiting for? Was there anything unique about Jesus coming at that particular time that would make it the "fullness of time"? (Galatians 4:4)***

43. John 1:11 is perhaps the saddest verse in the Bible. Jesus came "home" and His "family" rejected Him! The onlooking universe must have been stunned! Of course, by the time John was writing his Gospel, Jerusalem had been destroyed, and the Jews had been taken captive and scattered throughout the Roman Empire. But, something of supreme importance needed to be demonstrated by these people who were so dedicated to following the "blueprint." **Because they had a wrong picture of God, and thus, rejected the picture of God that Jesus brought, (John 1:18; 17:3-4) these Bible-reading, health-reforming, Sabbathkeeping, tithe-paying, blueprint-following adventists (they believed in the coming Messiah/Christ) were determined to get rid of Jesus as fast as they could.** This shows that if we obey God for the wrong reason(s), we are just as unsavable

(maybe more so) than the heathen!

The Four Gospels Together

44. [Introduction to the Gospels:] While Matthew focused on who Jesus was, **Mark focused on what Jesus did**. Luke addressed the question, “To whom did Jesus come?” John seemed to ask, “What did Jesus want us to learn?”
45. [Introduction to the Gospels:] **We use the Gospel Chronology as adapted from *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pages 194-201.**
46. [Introduction to the Gospels:] **The *SDA Bible Commentary* talks about how each of the four Gospels contributes to the whole picture of Jesus and God.**

[*SDA Bible Commentary*:] Inspiration has provided four more or less interdependent accounts of the life and teachings of our Lord. Each of these four has its own distinctive characteristics, each emphasizes certain aspects of the life and teachings of Jesus, each makes a unique contribution to the gospel narrative as a whole. Furthermore, each was apparently written with a specific objective in view that determined its arrangement of material, which is sometimes chronological and sometimes topical. See pp. 175-179, 272.

A complete picture of the gospel story can be secured only when the four accounts are properly blended together into one unified, chronological narrative. The arrangement of events by which such a composite narrative becomes possible is called a **harmony of the Gospels**. Less than half a century after the four Gospels are known to have been circulating together (which was soon after A.D. 125) Tatian combined the four accounts into one called the Diatessaron (c. A.D. 170; see p. 122). Since the appearance of this, the first Gospel harmony, countless attempts have been made to arrange the events of the life of our Lord in chronological order.

Although fundamental harmony pervades the four Gospel accounts, and although the four have much in common, there are at least three chronological problems that call for a solution. These problems are due largely to the fact that each Gospel records incidents not related by the others, and to the further fact that where the same incidents are recorded in more than one Gospel they do not always appear in the same order. **These three major problems are: (1) how to determine the length of Jesus’ ministry, (2) how to coordinate the Judean ministry, reported only by John, with the Galilean ministry of the Synoptics, as the first three Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—are commonly known, and (3) how to correlate events in the Peraean ministry, related only by Luke, with certain other events of the same period given by the other Gospel writers. It is not the purpose of this article to discuss the various problems encountered in arranging a Gospel harmony.** For a discussion of each of these three major problems see p. 247, Additional Note on Luke 4, and comment on Matt. 19:1

respectively, and for other problems see opening comment on the passages involved. Concerning the synoptic problem, see pp. 175-179, 306, 307.

Because of the existing differences of opinion on how to correlate the Gospel of John with the Synoptics, modern Gospel harmonies generally omit John. The best Greek harmonies are those of Burton and Goodspeed (*A Harmony of the Synoptic Gospels in Greek*) and Albert Huck (*Synopsis of the First Three Gospels*, reprinted 1949). The best English harmonies are those of the International Council of Religious Education (*Gospel Parallels*) and Ralph D. Heim (*A Harmony of the Gospels*, including John).

As noted, each of the four Gospels makes its own distinctive contribution to the Gospel story, and thus to a harmony of the Gospels. Acquaintance with the particular characteristics of the Gospels not only renders them individually more intelligible and meaningful, but contributes to a richer understanding and appreciation of the Gospel narrative as a whole. The following facts relating to each of the Gospels are particularly worthy of note in the construction of a harmony.

Matthew.—The author of the first Gospel was an eyewitness to events that occurred during approximately **the last half of Jesus' ministry**. In length and completeness his account is second only to that of Luke. Of the 179 incidents in the accompanying Harmony of the Gospels, Matthew has 95, or 53 per cent, and of these 14 are exclusive with him. **Matthew tends to group events in topical order**, and as a result his account often deviates from strict chronological order. **Matthew is pre-eminently the reporter of Jesus' sermons and other discourses**, such as the Sermon on the Mount (chs. 5 to 7), instruction given the Twelve (ch. 10), the Sermon by the Sea (ch. 13), the last day of teaching in the Temple (chs. 21; 22), and our Lord's return (chs. 24; 25). Matthew has altogether 21 of the 40 parables narrated by the various Gospel writers, and 20 of the 35 miracles.

Mark.—So far as is known, Mark was not an eyewitness of the events he describes. It is generally believed that he **narrates the life of Christ as he heard it from the lips of the apostle Peter** (see p. 178). Mark relates 79 of the 179 incidents listed in the accompanying Gospel Harmony (about 44 per cent), or nearly as many as Matthew, in less than two thirds of the space. Mark relates 18 of the 35 miracles, but only 6 of the 40 parables. Obviously it was **Mark's purpose to report what Jesus did rather than what He said**. The Gospel according to Mark might, for lack of a more exact term, be called a brief biography of our Lord. It follows a much more precise chronological pattern than that of Matthew. The resemblance between Matthew and Mark is particularly striking. Similarly, Mark has much in common with Luke, but Matthew resembles Luke less than it does Mark.

Luke.—As Luke specifically states (see on [Luke] ch. 1:1-4), he was not an eyewitness of the events he describes. **His Gospel is both longer and more**

complete than any of the others. Of the 179 incidents in the Harmony outline, Luke has 118, or about 66 per cent. **Of these, 43 incidents are exclusive with Luke. They are concerned mostly with the infancy and childhood of Jesus ([Luke] chs. 1; 2), and with the period of His Peraean ministry ([Luke] chs. 9:51 to 18:34), to which Luke devotes 31 per cent of his space. His order is more nearly chronological than that of Matthew,** but not so much so as that of Mark or, more especially, that of John. Luke reports 26 of the 40 parables, and 20 of the 35 miracles (see p. 192). From a historical point of view Luke is more full and complete than either of the first two Gospels, and, for that matter, than John. **Luke stands first in length, in completeness, in uniqueness, and in the number of miracles and parables reported.**

John.—In scope and content the Gospel of John is almost altogether different from the Synoptic Gospels. Although the writer of the fourth Gospel was an eyewitness of the life and ministry of Jesus from beginning to end, he mentions only 48 of the 179 incidents listed in the Harmony outline (27 per cent), far less than any of the others (see [John] chs. 20:30, 31; 21:25). Nevertheless, of these 48 incidents 31 are exclusive with him. Without the record given by John we would have little or no information concerning the first year of Jesus' ministry, devoted largely to Judea. **More important yet, John, alone among the gospel writers, follows a strictly chronological sequence from beginning to end and provides a framework by which it is possible to determine the approximate length of Jesus' ministry** (see pp. 192, 193).

With the entire scope of Jesus' life and ministry vividly in mind, John selected, primarily, those incidents that mark turning points and crises. But in each instance he shows greater interest in the significance of the event—as reflected each time by an accompanying discourse—than in the event itself. Like Matthew, though without duplication, John reports various discourses at considerable length; however, those reported by Matthew deal primarily with the kingdom of heaven and the character of its subjects, whereas those of **John are concerned almost exclusively with Jesus' nature as the incarnate Son of God and with the purpose of His earthly mission.** John is not so much a sermon reporter like Matthew, or a biographer like Mark, or a historian like Luke. **He is pre-eminently a theologian, whose inspired insight led him to set Jesus Christ forth as the incarnate Son of God.**—The Fourfold Gospel Narrative. F. D. Nichol (Ed.), *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 5 (pages 190-192). Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association (1956).^{†‡§}

47. [Introduction to the Gospels:] Consider what Ellen G. White wrote about the benefit to us from having all four Gospels.

[From the writings of Ellen G. White:] In our Bible, we might ask, why need Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, in the Gospels, why need the writer of the

Acts of the Apostles, and the various writers of the Epistles so largely go over the same ground? **The Lord gave his Word in just the way he wanted it to come. He gave it through different writers, each having his own individuality, though going over the same history.** The different testimonies are brought together in one book, and are like the testimonies in a social meeting. They do not represent things in just the same style. Each writer has an experience of his own, and this diversity broadens and deepens the knowledge that is brought out to meet the necessities of varied minds. The thoughts expressed have not a set uniformity, as if cast in an iron mould [*sic*-British spelling], making the very hearing monotonous. In such a uniformity there would be a loss of grace and distinctive beauty.—Ellen G. White, *Letters and Manuscripts*,* vol. 15, Manuscript 105, 1900, par. 2.^{†‡}

[\[https://egwwritings.org/read?panels=p14065.13820008&index=0\]](https://egwwritings.org/read?panels=p14065.13820008&index=0)[‡]

48. [Introduction to the Gospels:] ***What do all these differences in the Gospels tell us about God? Was the Holy Spirit reaching out to all people though the different Gospels?***

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