

Backgrounds to the four Gospels

(material taken from the NIV Study Bible and First Century Study Bible)

Matthew

Author

Matthew means “gift of God” in Hebrew (*Mattityahu*). In Mark and Luke he is called by his other name, Levi (many biblical figures had two names). In Mark 2:14 he is further identified as “son of Alphaeus.”

He was a tax collector (another word for tax collector is “publican”) who left his work to follow Jesus (9:9-13). Matthew resided at Capernaum on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. This was a lucrative spot because there was a considerable amount of fishing in the Sea of Galilee. Also, a major road, the *via maris* (“way of the sea”) ran from Babylon to Egypt, passing through Israel and very near Capernaum. Throughout biblical history this was a major route both for commerce and military invasion. We could compare the *via maris* to our interstate highway system today. Matthew was the chief tax collector in this particular city, making him a fairly wealthy man.

Although the first Gospel is anonymous, the early church fathers were unanimous in holding that Matthew, one of the 12 apostles, was its author.

Place of Writing

The Jewish nature of Matthew’s Gospel may suggest that it was written in the Holy Land, though many think it may have originated in Syrian Antioch. The church in Antioch had a large Greek-speaking Jewish population and was at the forefront of the mission to the Gentiles, a theme Matthew emphasizes (for example, 28:18–20).

Recipients

Many elements in Matthew’s Gospel point to a Jewish or Jewish-Christian readership:

- Matthew’s concern with fulfillment of the Old Testament (he has more quotations from and allusions to the Old Testament than any other New Testament author);
- his tracing of Jesus’ descent from Abraham (1:1–17);
- his lack of explanation of Jewish customs (especially in contrast to Mark);
- his use of Jewish terminology (for example, “kingdom of heaven,” where “heaven” reveals the Jewish reverential reluctance to use the name of God lest they violate the Third Commandment against taking God’s name in vain);
- his emphasis on Jesus’ role as “Son of David” (1:1; 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30–31; 21:9, 15; 22:41–45).

He also has a working knowledge of Jewish interpretive debates and various Jewish customs. This does not mean, however, that Matthew restricts his Gospel to Jews. He records the coming of the Magi (non-Jews) to worship the infant Jesus (2:1–12), as well as Jesus’ statement that the “field is the world” (13:38). He also gives a full statement of the Great Commission (28:18–20). These passages show that, although Matthew’s Gospel is Jewish, it has a universal outlook.

Purpose

Matthew's main purpose is to confirm for his Jewish-Christian readers that Jesus is their Messiah. He does this primarily by showing how Jesus in His life and ministry fulfilled biblical prophecies of the Messiah. Although all the Gospel writers quote the Old Testament, Matthew includes many proof texts unique to his Gospel (for example, 1:22–23; 2:15; 2:17–18; 2:23; 4:14–16; 8:17; 12:17–21; 13:35; 27:9–10) to drive home his basic theme: Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament predictions of the Messiah. Matthew even finds the history of God's people in the Old Testament recapitulated in some aspects of Jesus' life (see, for example, his quotation of Hosea 11:1 in 2:15). To accomplish his purpose Matthew also emphasizes Jesus' Davidic lineage (see Recipients). In addition, Jesus appears as a kind of second Moses in his Sermon on the Mount discourse, recalling Moses' delivery of the words of God from Sinai.

Structure

Matthew arranges his material in a unique way. The whole Gospel is woven around five great discourses or collections of sayings and teachings: (1) chapters 5–7; (2) chapter 10; (3) chapter 13; (4) chapter 18; (5) chapters 24–25. That this is deliberate is clear from the wording that concludes each discourse: “When Jesus had finished saying these things,” or similar words (7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). The narrative sections between these sections transition between them. The Gospel has a fitting prologue (chapters 1–2) and a challenging epilogue (28:16–20). (Some scholars suggest that there are two other discourses: Matthew 23, where Jesus condemns the religious hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees, and Matthew 28:16–20, where Jesus gives the great commission.) The fivefold division may suggest that Matthew has modeled his book on the structure of the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament). He may also be presenting the gospel as a new Torah or new commentary on the Torah, and Jesus as a new and greater Moses.

Matthew uses other structural features as well. Some, for example, think the phrase “From that time on” marks three main sections of the book (4:17; 16:21; 26:16). The outline below follows a geographic structure interspersed with the five main discourses.

Outline

The Birth and Early Years of Jesus (chapters 1–2)

His Genealogy (1:1–17)

His Birth (1:18–2:12)

His Stay in Egypt (2:13–23)

The Beginnings of Jesus' Ministry (3:1–4:11)

His Forerunner (3:1–12)

His Baptism (3:13–17)

His Temptation (4:1–11)

Jesus' Ministry in Galilee (4:12–14:12)

The Beginning of the Galilean Campaign (4:12–25)

Discourse One: The Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5–7)

A Collection of Miracles (chapters 8–9)

Discourse Two: The Commissioning of the 12 Apostles (chapter 10)

Ministry throughout Galilee (chapters 11–12)

Discourse Three: The Parables of the Kingdom (chapter 13)

Herod's Reaction to Jesus' Ministry (14:1–12)

Jesus' Withdrawals from Galilee (14:13–17:20)
 To the Eastern Shore of the Sea of Galilee (14:13–15:20)
 To Phoenicia (15:21–28)
 To the Decapolis (15:29–16:12)
 To Caesarea Philippi (16:13–17:20)

 Jesus' Last Ministry in Galilee (17:22–18:35)
 Prediction of Jesus' Death (17:22–23)
 Temple Tax (17:24–27)
 Discourse Four: Discourse on Life in the Kingdom (chapter 18)

 Jesus' Ministry in Judea and Perea (chapters 19–20)
 Teaching concerning Divorce (19:1–12)
 Teaching concerning Little Children (19:13–15)
 The Rich Young Man (19:16–30)
 The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (20:1–16)
 Prediction of Jesus' Death (20:17–19)
 A Mother's Request (20:20–28)
 Restoration of Sight at Jericho (20:29–34)

 Passion Week (chapters 21–27)
 The Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem as King (21:1–11)
 The Clearing of the Temple (21:12–17)
 The Last Controversies with the Jewish Leaders (21:18–23:39)
 Discourse Five: The Olivet Discourse (chapters 24–25)
 The Anointing of Jesus' Feet (26:1–13)
 The Arrest, Trials and Death of Jesus (26:14–27:66)

 The Resurrection (chapter 28)
 The Earthquake and the Angel's Announcement (28:1–7)
 Jesus' Encounter with the Women (28:8–10)
 The Guards' Report and the Jewish Elders' Bribe (28:11–15)
 The Great Commission (28:16–20)

Mark

Author

Although there is no direct internal evidence of authorship, it was the unanimous testimony of the early church that this Gospel was written by John Mark ("John, also called Mark," Acts 12:12, 25; 15:37). The most important evidence comes from Papias (ca. AD 140), who quotes an even earlier source as saying: (1) Mark was a close associate of Peter, from whom he received the tradition of the things said and done by the Lord (see 1 Peter 5:13); (2) this tradition did not come to Mark as a finished, sequential account of the life of our Lord, but as the preaching of Peter directed to the needs of the early Christian communities; (3) Mark accurately preserved this material. The conclusion drawn from this tradition is that the Gospel of Mark largely consists of the preaching of Peter arranged and shaped by Mark.

John Mark in the New Testament

It is generally agreed that the Mark who is associated with Peter in the early non-biblical tradition is also the John Mark of the New Testament. The first mention of him is in connection with his

mother, Mary, who had a house in Jerusalem that served as a meeting place for believers (see Acts 12:12). When Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch from Jerusalem after the famine visit, Mark accompanied them (see Acts 12:25). Mark next appears as a “helper” to Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey (see Acts 13:5), but he deserted them at Perga in Pamphylia to return to Jerusalem (see Acts 13:13).

Paul must have been deeply disappointed with Mark’s actions on this occasion, because when Barnabas proposed taking Mark on the second journey, Paul flatly refused, a refusal that broke up their working relationship (see Acts 15:36–39). Barnabas took Mark, who was his cousin (see Colossians 4:10), and departed for Cyprus. No further mention is made of either of them in the book of Acts.

Mark reappears in Paul’s letter to the Colossians, written from Rome. Paul sends a greeting from Mark and adds: “You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him” (Colossians 4:10; see Philemon 24, written at about the same time). At this point Mark was apparently beginning to win his way back into Paul’s confidence. By the end of Paul’s life, Mark had fully regained Paul’s favor (see 2 Timothy 4:11).

Place of Writing

According to early tradition, Mark was written “in the regions of Italy” (Anti-Marcionite Prologue, a work possibly dating as early as the second century AD directed against the heretical views of Marcion) or, more specifically, in Rome (Irenaeus; Clement of Alexandria). These same authors closely associate Mark’s writing of the Gospel with the apostle Peter. The above evidence is consistent with (1) the historical probability that Peter was in Rome during the last days of his life and was martyred there and (2) the biblical evidence that Mark also was in Rome about the same time and was closely associated with Peter (see 2 Timothy 4:11).

Recipients

The evidence points to the church at Rome or at least to Gentile readers. Mark explains Jewish customs (7:2–4; 15:42), translates Aramaic words (3:17; 5:41; 7:11, 34; 15:22, 34) and seems to have a special interest in persecution and martyrdom (8:34–38; 13:9–13)—subjects of special concern to Roman believers (and to Peter as well; compare 1 Peter). He also includes several Latin phrases that would have meant nothing to Jewish readers.

Occasion and Purpose

Since Mark’s Gospel is traditionally associated with Rome, it may have been occasioned by the persecutions of the Roman church in the period ca. AD 64–67. The famous fire of Rome in 64—probably set by Nero himself but blamed on Christians—resulted in widespread persecution. Even martyrdom was not unknown among Roman believers. Mark may be writing to prepare his readers for such suffering by placing before them the life of our Lord. There are many references, both explicit and veiled, to suffering and discipleship throughout his Gospel (see 1:12–13; 3:22, 30; 8:34–38; 10:30, 33–34, 45; 13:8–13).

Emphases

- *Jesus is the Son of God.* Mark emphasizes the humanity of Jesus, but also emphasizes that He is the Son of God. One of the ways he does this is by emphasizing miracles, of which 18 are included in his Gospel.
- *The death of Jesus.* He emphasizes that the Jewish leadership conspired to kill Jesus, but that this was also a divine necessity for Him to die for the sins of mankind.

- *The teachings of Jesus*. Although Mark records far fewer actual teachings of Jesus than the other Gospel writers, there is a strong emphasis on Jesus as teacher. The words “teacher,” “teach” or “teaching,” and “Rabbi” are applied to Jesus 39 times in Mark.
- *Discipleship*. He talks a great deal about what it means to be a disciple and follower of Jesus Christ (8:34-9:1; 9:35-10:31; 10:42-45).

Special Characteristics

Mark’s Gospel has an emphasis on action. It’s a simple but vivid account of Jesus’ ministry, emphasizing more what Jesus *did* than what He said. Why does he do this? For two reasons. First, Peter, who was the source of this material, was a man of action. So it’s only natural that Mark’s Gospel would reflect that. And second, the Romans were people of action. One thing that the Roman world would really appreciate was people who got things done. The Romans were great builders of roads, cities and an empire. They built things you can still see today all over Europe, the Middle East and North Africa. Mark seems to include that in his Gospel because the Romans could identify with men of action.

Outline

The Beginnings of Jesus’ Ministry (1:1–13)

His Forerunner (1:1–8)

His Baptism (1:9–11)

His Temptation (1:12–13)

Jesus’ Ministry in Galilee (1:14–6:29)

Early Galilean Ministry (1:14–3:12)

Call of the first disciples (1:14–20)

Miracles in Capernaum (1:21–34)

Preaching and healing in Galilee (1:35–45)

Ministry in Capernaum (2:1–22)

Sabbath controversy (2:23–3:12)

Later Galilean Ministry (3:13–6:29)

Choosing the 12 apostles (3:13–19)

Teachings in Capernaum (3:20–35)

Parables of the kingdom (4:1–34)

Calming the Sea of Galilee (4:35–41)

Healing a demon-possessed man (5:1–20)

More Galilean miracles (5:21–43)

Unbelief in Jesus’ hometown (6:1–6)

Six apostolic teams preach and heal in Galilee (6:7–13)

King Herod’s reaction to Jesus’ ministry (6:14–29)

Strategic Withdrawals from Galilee (6:30–9:29)

To the Eastern Shore of the Sea of Galilee (6:30–52)

To the Western Shore of the Sea (6:53–7:23)

To Syrian Phoenicia (7:24–30)

To the Region of the Decapolis (7:31–8:10)

To the Vicinity of Caesarea Philippi (8:11–30)

To the Mount of Transfiguration (8:31–9:29)

Final Ministry in Galilee (9:30–50)
 Jesus' Ministry in Judea and Perea (chapter 10)
 Teaching concerning Divorce (10:1–12)
 Teaching concerning Children (10:13–16)
 The Rich Young Man (10:17–31)
 A Request of Two Brothers (10:32–45)
 Restoration of Bartimaeus's Sight (10:46–52)

 The Passion of Jesus (chapters 11–15)
 The Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem as King (11:1–11)
 The Clearing of the Temple (11:12–19)
 Concluding Controversies with Jewish Leaders (11:20–12:44)
 The Olivet Discourse (chapter 13)
 The Anointing of Jesus (14:1–11)
 The Lord's Supper (14:12–26)
 The Arrest, Trial and Death of Jesus (14:27–15:47)

 The Resurrection of Jesus (chapter 16)

Luke

Author

This Gospel is a companion volume to the book of Acts, and the language and structure of these two books indicate that both were written by the same person. They are addressed to the same individual, Theophilus, and the second volume refers to the first (Acts 1:1).

Certain sections in Acts use the pronoun “we,” showing that the author was with Paul when the events in these passages took place. By process of elimination, Paul’s “dear friend Luke, the doctor” (as he is called in Colossians 4:14) and “fellow worker” (as he is called in Philemon 24), becomes the most likely candidate.

Luke was probably a Gentile by birth, well educated in Greek culture, a physician by profession, and had outstanding command of the Greek language. He was a companion of Paul at various times from his second missionary journey to his final imprisonment in Rome, and a loyal friend who remained with the apostle after others had deserted him (2 Timothy 4:11).

Because Paul went largely to the Greek world, this is what Luke’s Gospel seems oriented to. His Gospel is historical and detailed because he is trying to establish in the Greek world the history of Jesus Christ. He writes to logically explain Jesus Christ because the Greek mind is oriented to logic. He also includes a great deal of detail in his Gospel and the book of Acts that has been verified by archaeology, such as individuals who held office in particular cities at a particular time. He included all this to prove his message then, and ironically it has allowed historians and archaeologists to prove his message today also.

Recipient and Purpose

The Gospel is specifically directed to Theophilus (1:3), an individual whose name means “one who loves God” or “lover of God.” The use of “most excellent” with the name indicates this was an individual, and supports the idea that Theophilus may have been a Roman official or at least someone of high position and wealth. He was possibly Luke’s patron, supporting Luke while he devoted his time and energy to writing these two books. Such a dedication to the publisher was common at that time. The fact that the Gospel was initially directed to Theophilus does not narrow

or limit its purpose. It was written to strengthen the faith of all believers and to answer the attacks of unbelievers (see 1:1–4).

Theophilus, however, was more than a patron. The message of this Gospel was intended for his own instruction (see 1:4), as well as for the instruction of those among whom the book would be circulated. Luke wanted to show that the place of gentile Christians in God’s Kingdom is based on the teaching of Jesus. He wanted to commend the preaching of the gospel to the whole world.

Luke was *not* an eyewitness. He spoke to those who *were* eyewitnesses. He spent a lot of time with the apostle Paul, so obviously he was one of the sources. He begins his Gospel with:

**1 “Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us,
2 just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us,**

And then he spells out the purpose in verses 3–4: **“It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.”**

So Luke tells us several things here. He says that others have already written down accounts of Christ’s life. Possibly he’s referring to Matthew and Mark, but there are other accounts that weren’t preserved for us because God didn’t want them preserved. There are other false gospels that have been found, but they date to many years later and are usually gnostic writings that are contrary to true biblical teaching. They are definitely not inspired and not true.

Luke then says that he determined to write an orderly account based on what he knew of these events. How did he know about them? He talked to people who were eyewitnesses. For example, he includes a lot of details about Mary and the angelic appearances to her and to Joseph. How did Luke know these details? He obviously learned them from talking with Mary or other members of Jesus’ family. He obviously talked to other apostles who had been with Jesus during His ministry. He was also a companion of Paul, and Paul may have shared with Luke things that Jesus had told him during the three years Paul was personally taught by Jesus in the desert.

Place of Writing

The place of writing was probably Rome. By its detailed designations of places in the Holy Land, the Gospel seems to be intended for readers who were unfamiliar with that land.

Style

Luke had outstanding command of the Greek language. His vocabulary is extensive and rich, and his style at times approaches that of classical Greek (as in the preface, 1:1–4), while at other times it is quite Semitic (see 1:5–2:52)—often like the Septuagint (the pre-Christian Greek translation of the Old Testament).

Characteristics

Luke’s Gospel presents the works and teachings of Jesus that are especially important for understanding the way of salvation. He covers the entire story from the birth of Christ to His ascension to heaven, and in the book of Acts continues the story of the early Church. His writing appeals to both Jews and Gentiles. It is characterized by literary excellence, historical detail and warm, sensitive understanding of Jesus and those around him. He has a tender heart with a special

emphasis on women, children, the family and the poor, as we see from the stories and parables he includes. He recognizes the place of Gentiles as well as Jews in God's plan.

Since the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) report many of the same episodes in Jesus' life, one would expect much similarity in their accounts. The dissimilarities reveal the distinctive emphases of the separate writers. Luke's characteristic themes include: (1) universality, recognition of Gentiles as well as Jews in God's plan (see, for example, 2:30–32 and note on 2:25–35); (2) emphasis on prayer, especially Jesus' praying before important occasions (see 3:21); (3) joy at the announcement of the gospel or "good news" (1:14); (4) special concern for the role of women (see, for example, 8:2–3 and note); (5) special interest in the poor and in issues of social justice (see 12:33 and note on 12:22–34); (6) concern for sinners (Jesus was viewed as a friend of sinners and tax collectors); (7) stress on the family circle (Jesus' activity included men, women and children, with the setting frequently in the home); (8) emphasis on the Holy Spirit (see 4:1); (9) inclusion of more parables than any other Gospel; and (10) emphasis on praising God (1:64; 24:53).

Sources

Luke tells us that many others had written of Jesus' life (1:1), but he went beyond this for his own writing. He used personal investigation and arrangement, based on testimony from "eyewitnesses and ministers of the word" (1:2)—including the preaching and oral accounts of the apostles. His sections of distinctive material (see, for example, 10:1–18:14; 19:1–28) indicate independent work that doesn't appear in Matthew or Mark, though he obviously used some of the same sources as Matthew and Mark.

Structure

Luke basically covers Jesus' ministry geographically: (1) the events that occurred in and around Galilee (4:14–9:50), (2) those that took place in Judea and Perea (9:51–19:27) and (3) those of the final week in Jerusalem (19:28–24:53). Luke's uniqueness is especially seen in the amount of material devoted to Jesus' closing ministry in Judea and Perea, a section often called Jesus' "Journey to Jerusalem" or "The Travel Narrative." This material is predominantly made up of accounts of Jesus' discourses. Of the 28 parables that occur in Luke, 21 are found in 10:30–19:27. Of the 20 miracles recorded in Luke, only 5 appear in 9:51–19:27. The main theme of the teaching, parables and stories in this section is God's love for the lost: sinners, outcasts, Samaritans and people of low social status. Already in 9:51 Jesus is seen anticipating His final appearance in Jerusalem and His crucifixion (see 13:33).

The main theme of the Gospel is the nature of Jesus' Messiahship and mission, and a key verse is 19:10—"for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."

Outline

The Preface (1:1–4)

The Births of John the Baptist and Jesus (1:5–2:52)

The Annunciations (1:5–56)

The Birth of John the Baptist (1:57–80)

The Birth and Childhood of Jesus (chapter 2)

The Preparation of Jesus for His Public Ministry (3:1–4:13)

His Forerunner (3:1–20)

His Baptism (3:21–22)

His Genealogy (3:23–38)

His Temptation (4:1–13)

His Ministry in Galilee (4:14–9:9)

The Beginning of the Ministry in Galilee (4:14–41)

The First Tour of Galilee (4:42–5:39)

A Sabbath Controversy (6:1–11)

The Choice of the 12 Apostles (6:12–16)

The Sermon on the Plateau (6:17–49)

Miracles in Capernaum and Nain (7:1–18)

The Inquiry of John the Baptist (7:19–29)

Jesus and the Pharisees (7:30–50)

The Second Tour of Galilee (8:1–3)

The Parables of the Kingdom (8:4–21)

The Trip Across the Sea of Galilee (8:22–39)

The Third Tour of Galilee (8:40–9:9)

His Withdrawal to Regions around Galilee (9:10–50)

To the Eastern Shore of the Sea of Galilee (9:10–17)

To Caesarea Philippi (9:18–50)

His Ministry in Judea (9:51–13:21)

Journey through Samaria to Judea (9:51–62)

The Mission of the 72 (10:1–24)

The Lawyer and the Parable of the Good Samaritan (10:25–37)

Jesus at Bethany with Mary and Martha (10:38–42)

Teachings in Judea (11:1–13:21)

His Ministry in and Around Perea (13:22–19:27)

The Narrow Door (13:22–30)

Warning Concerning Herod (13:31–35)

At a Pharisee's House (14:1–23)

The Cost of Discipleship (14:24–35)

The Parables of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin and the Lost Son (chapter 15)

The Parable of the Shrewd Manager (16:1–18)

The Rich Man and Lazarus (16:19–31)

Miscellaneous Teachings (17:1–10)

Ten Healed of Leprosy (17:11–19)

The Coming of the Kingdom (17:20–37)

The Persistent Widow (18:1–8)

The Pharisee and the Tax Collector (18:9–14)

Jesus and the Children (18:15–17)

The Rich Young Ruler (18:18–30)

Christ Foretells His Death (18:31–34)

A Blind Beggar Given His Sight (18:35–43)

Jesus and Zacchaeus (19:1–10)

The Parable of the Ten Minas (19:11–27)

His Last Days: Sacrifice and Triumph (19:28–24:53)

The Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem as King (19:28–44)

The Clearing of the Temple (19:45–48)
 The Last Controversies with the Jewish Leaders (chapter 20)
 The Olivet Discourse (chapter 21)
 The Last Supper (22:1–38)
 Jesus Praying in Gethsemane (22:39–46)
 Jesus’ Arrest (22:47–65)
 Jesus on Trial (22:66–23:25)
 The Crucifixion (23:26–56)
 The Resurrection (24:1–12)
 The Postresurrection Ministry (24:13–49)
 The Ascension (24:50–53)

John

Author

The author is the apostle John, “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” John (Hebrew *Johanon*, meaning “God is a gracious giver”) is the brother of another apostle, James, them being the sons of Zebedee. John is also known as the apostle of love. You will find that word often in John’s Gospel and also in his letters. James and John were at first called “the sons of thunder.” They were the ones who wanted to bring fire down out of heaven, to which Christ responded you do not know of what spirit you are. But John changed through God’s Spirit.

He became a good example of a man who was very deeply converted. He had a love of Christ, so much so that Jesus, when He was dying, looked at John and told him to take care of His mother. John was also a cousin of Jesus Christ. We don’t have space to go into the evidence for that here, but you can read about it in the booklet *Jesus Christ: The Real Story*.

John knew Jewish life well. We see this from references to popular Messianic speculations (see, for example, 1:21; 7:40–42); to the hostility between Jews and Samaritans (see 4:9), and to Jewish customs, such as the duty of circumcision on the eighth day taking precedence over the prohibition of working on the Sabbath.

He knew the geography of the Holy Land, mentioning Bethany being about two miles from Jerusalem (11:18) and mentioning Cana, a village not referred to in any earlier writing known to us (see 2:1; 21:2). The Gospel of John has many touches that appear to reflect the recollections of an eyewitness—such as the house at Bethany being filled with the fragrance of the broken perfume jar when Mary anointed Jesus before His death in John 12:3.

John was prominent in the early Church but is not mentioned by name in this Gospel—which would be natural if he wrote it, but hard to explain otherwise.

Date

Most scholars believe John’s Gospel was written much later, probably in the 90s, to supplement the accounts found in the other Gospels. John seems to deliberately avoid including material previously covered in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. The more developed theology of John’s Gospel and its counterarguments to gnosticism also indicates that it originated later in the first century when gnostic thought was more widespread and influencing the Church. .

Purpose and Emphases

John's Gospel is quite different from the other three. Matthew, Mark and Luke are called the *synoptic* Gospels. "Optic" refers to viewing or seeing. "Syn" means the same or together. So *synoptic* means having the same view, or the view that is together. They are very similar, giving a similar view and generally covering the same material.

John's Gospel is totally different. John gives a view of Christ that is quite different from the others. He highlights matters that the other Gospels don't. There is very little overlap between what John covers and what we find in the synoptic Gospels. The literary style of this Gospel is also unique among the Gospels. The Gospel of John has no parables in it. His focus is on the "signs" of Jesus' identity and mission and on deep, detailed theological discussions.

John states his main purpose clearly in John 20:31: **"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 is also combating gnosticism. Gnosticism taught that anything physical was evil and created by an evil power, and anything that is spiritual is good and from God. John emphasizes that Jesus was God who came in the flesh. Gnostics would deny that Jesus was the Messiah because He was physical. So John spends a lot of time countering such thought in his Gospel and in his letters. This is a primary reason many date John's Gospel to the 90s A.D.

John talks a lot about Jesus' humanity. He shows that Jesus was a human being who got tired, grew thirsty and was troubled. He shows that Jesus truly loved people. All of these were diametrically opposed to what gnosticism taught.

John begins with the profound announcement that Jesus is the divine "Word" of self-revelation—who existed with God from the beginning and through whom God created all things. Jesus the "Word" became embodied (incarnated) as a human being to be the light of life for the world. After this comes the proclamation that this Jesus is the Son of God sent from the Father to finish the Father's work in the world (see 4:34). God's own glory is made visible in Him ("Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father," 14:9), and what He does glorifies the Father. In Him the full grace and truth of God have shown themselves (compare 1:17–18). Strikingly, a series of "I am" claims on Jesus' lips echo God's naming of Himself in Ex 3:14, further strengthening the link between the Father and the Son (see 6:35; 8:12; 8:58; 9:5; 10:7, 9, 14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1, 5).

He also places Jesus at many important Jewish festivals (for example, Tabernacles, The Festival of Dedication, also called Hanukkah [10:22]) and three separate Passovers. At the same time, He sometimes refers to the crowds, often translated "the Jews," as the enemies of Jesus (see 8:31–59 and note on 8:39). John's Gospel has been used to support anti-Semitic ideas at various times in church history. This should be balanced with the fact that all of Jesus' followers were Jewish, one of whom was a prominent Pharisee (see 3:1), and Jesus' own words, "Salvation is from the Jews" (4:22). With that said, John's vision of the gospel includes both Jews and Gentiles (10:16).

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