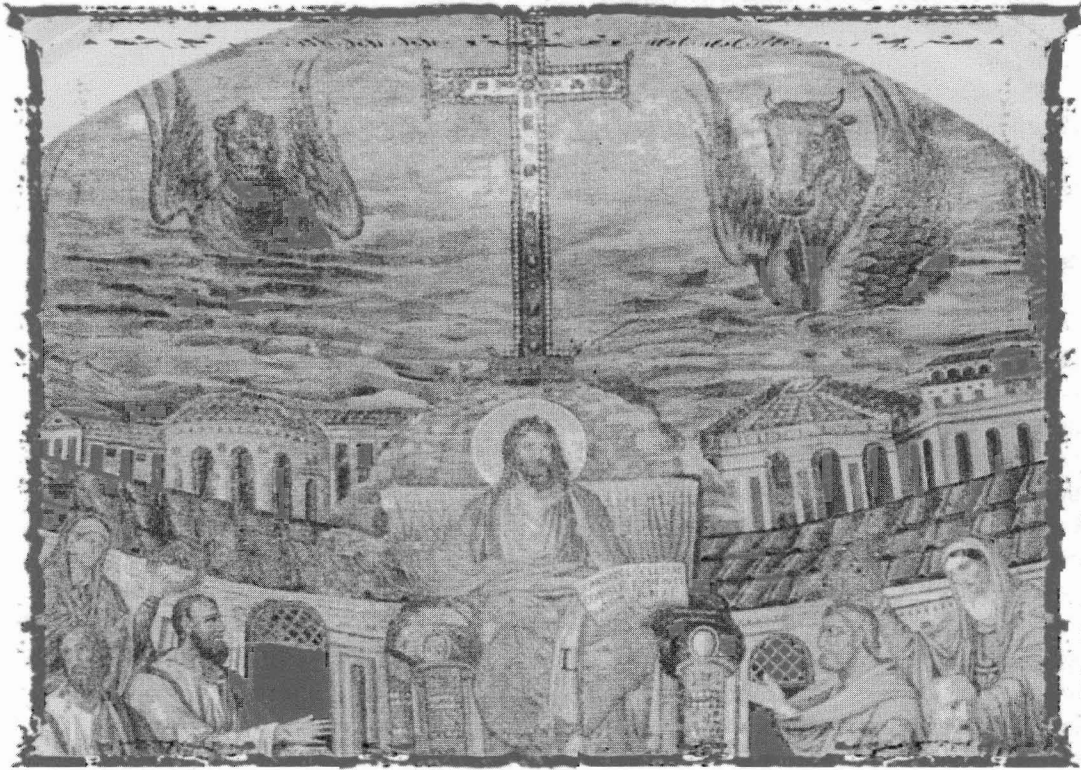


# MATTHEW MARK LUKE



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**Mosaic showing the Church of the Apostles, a first-century synagogue-church**

With this lesson we move into the New Testament. Our subjects are the first three Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke. These Gospels are called the Synoptic Gospels. The term *synoptic* comes from a Greek word *synopsis*, which means “common perspective.” Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called the Synoptic Gospels because they share a similar perspective on the life and teachings of Jesus. All three Gospels use a common outline for Jesus’ ministry. All three differ from the Gospel of John.

Although Matthew, Mark, and Luke are very similar, many differences exist among the three. In order to gain some insight into why these three Gospels agree in many respects and differ in others, let us take a closer look at the introduction

to the Gospel of Luke in Luke 1:1-4.

In these verses the writer of Luke tells us a number of things about the origin of his book. First of all others before him have written narratives or gospels about Jesus. Second, Luke knows and relies on these earlier narrative accounts. Third, these earlier accounts were compiled from the traditions passed along by eyewitnesses and ministers of the word. Fourth, Luke declares that he wants to present the narratives about Jesus in an orderly account. He plans to give the material in what he considers to be the best order, although an order that differs from that of other writers.

We can discern two general principles about the origin of the Gospels from these opening verses of Luke. First of all some of

the writers of the Gospels depended on earlier narratives or gospels. So the first three Gospels have a literary relationship. This relationship explains their similarities and common perspectives. In the second place, the Gospel writers went their own ways in shaping the materials for their own purposes. Their varied purposes explain their differences.

Throughout the history of the church Christian thinkers have tried to determine the literary relationship among Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Most scholars have concluded that Mark was the earliest Gospel and that the writers of both Matthew and Luke used Mark in writing their books.

Matthew and Luke differ from Mark in one major respect. These two Gospels contain many of Jesus' teachings that do not appear in Mark. Most of the best-known parables and sayings of Jesus are not found in Mark. However, both Matthew and Luke contain many of these teachings. This fact could mean either that Luke or Matthew depended on the other or that both depended on a common source not used by Mark. Most biblical students today conclude that Matthew and Luke used a collection of the teachings of Jesus, a collection that did not survive as an independent work. This collection is commonly called "Q," the first letter of the German word *Quelle*, which means "source."

### **MATTHEW 1:1-17**

Let us now examine each of these three Gospels individually. We will start with Matthew. Matthew begins with two introductory chapters on the ancestry and birth of Jesus. We find the list of Jesus' ancestors in the first seventeen verses of the book.

Matthew 1:1-17 gives us the genealogy of Jesus. Most of the names are of men, but several women are also referred to. Read these verses, and list below as many references to women as you can find.

### **MATTHEW 1:18-13:58**

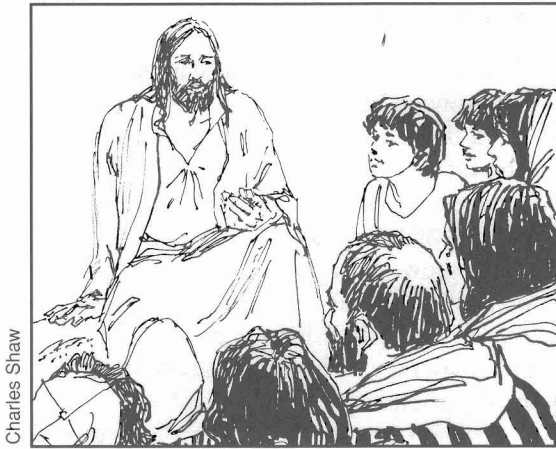
An account of Jesus' birth follows this list of ancestors. Matthew's account of Jesus' birth has several special features. Matthew gives special attention to Joseph. An angel of the Lord appears to Joseph in a dream, telling him that Mary his betrothed is with child by the Holy Spirit. Read Matthew 1:18-21.

Matthew's story assumes that Bethlehem is the home of the Holy Family. Wise men visit the birthplace after seeing the star. Joseph takes his family to Egypt after being warned in a dream to flee. King Herod slaughters all children "in and around Bethlehem" who are two years old or less. After Herod's death, Joseph takes his family to Nazareth in Galilee rather than returning to Judea.

Matthew understands all the events associated with Jesus' birth as fulfillments of Old Testament prophecies. The first two chapters alone quote four Old Testament passages. This emphasis on Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy continues throughout the Gospel.

In his desire to show God's promises to Israel fulfilled through Jesus to the church, Matthew pictures Jesus as a figure of great authority—a new Moses passing down a new law. Matthew begins developing this theme as early as the birth story, in which foreign kings come to honor the newborn child. Matthew organizes his material to emphasize Jesus' authority.

The most noteworthy feature about the Gospel of Matthew is the fact that the writer collects the sayings and teachings of Jesus into five major speeches. In Chapters 5 to 7 we have the Sermon on the Mount, in which Jesus speaks of the nature and character of life in the Kingdom. The narratives in Chapters 8 and 9 follow this speech. The second speech is in Chapter 10 where Jesus discusses the nature of mission work in the world. Narratives follow in Chapters 11 and 12. Chapter 13 contains a



**Jesus teaching**

collection of Jesus' parables on the Kingdom.

Matthew 5:1-12 contains the Beatitudes, a part of the Sermon on the Mount. Each Beatitude begins with the word *Blessed*. Write down the kind of people that are blessed in each beatitude.

a. (5:3)

b. (5:4)

c. (5:5)

d. (5:6)

e. (5:7)

f. (5:8)

g. (5:9)

h. (5:10)

### **MATTHEW 14-28**

Chapters 14 through 17 are narratives. The fourth speech follows in Chapter 18 where Jesus discusses life in community and the relationship of members to one another. The fifth speech is in Chapters 24 through 25 where Jesus denounces the Jewish leaders and talks about the events of the last days. In these five speeches, Matthew presents the words of Jesus as the authoritative voice of God's son. In the remainder of the Gospel, Matthew reports appearances of the risen Christ and concludes with Jesus' final commission to the eleven disciples.

### **MARK 1-9**

Let us now turn to the beginning of the Gospel of Mark. Mark opens with an account of the preaching and activity of John the Baptist. The Gospel writer views John as the messenger that the Old Testament speaks of as coming before the time of final salvation. John not only fulfills the Old Testament prophecy, he proclaims the coming of Jesus. Mark 1:9-11 reports John's baptism of Jesus. A voice from heaven declares Jesus to be God's beloved son. Read Mark 1:9-11.

The reader of Mark is therefore left with no doubt about the identity of Jesus. He is the fulfillment of Old Testament hopes and is the Son of God.

After a brief reference to Jesus' temptations in the wilderness, Mark tells us that John is arrested and that Jesus then begins his preaching career in Galilee. Mark 1:15 gives us Mark's summary of the basic preaching of Jesus: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." Jesus

preaches that the age of salvation is near. People should prepare for the Kingdom through repentance and belief in the good news.

The rest of Mark 1 and Chapters 2 through 9 describe Jesus' activity and preaching in Galilee and the surrounding regions. Mark focuses on the mighty acts of Jesus—his healings, casting out of demons, stilling the storms, and feeding the multitudes. Very little of Jesus' teaching appears, although Chapter 4—which contains several parables—is an exception.

Mark 5:1-20 contains a typical story of Jesus casting out demons. After reading the story, answer the following questions in your own words.

a. When the wretched man meets Jesus, he cries out to him. What impression do his words leave on the reader of the story? (5:6-7)

b. In what forms was the control of the man by the unclean spirit indicated? (5:3-5)

c. How could an onlooker have known that the man had in fact been healed by the words of Jesus? (5:15)

d. Jesus told the healed man to "tell them how much the Lord has done for you." How do we know that the healed man understood who the Lord was? (5:20)

## **MARK 10-16**

In the first nine chapters Mark stresses the growing hostility toward Jesus. For Mark the shadow of suffering and persecution falls quickly over Jesus' career. Here we see a special characteristic of Mark's portrait of Jesus—Jesus is the suffering one. Mark shows Jesus teaching his disciples that suffering and humiliation will be their fate as well. Mark 10 tells the story of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem accompanied by his disciples.

At the beginning of Chapter 11 Jesus and his followers arrive in Jerusalem on what we today call Palm Sunday. The account of Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem, his suffering, passion, death, and resurrection make up the remainder of the book. The final chapter of Mark—Chapter 16—tells of the women's visit to Jesus' tomb.

One of the interesting and perhaps surprising things about the Gospel of Mark is that we do not know for sure how the book ended. The oldest copies of the book end with Mark 16:8, which states that the women "said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." Other ancient manuscripts have twelve additional verses. These appear as verses 9 to 20 in many translations. Still other ancient texts add two short verses after verse 8.

Today most scholars believe the Gospel ended with verse 8. Persons in the early church felt that this ending was not satisfactory, and thus they added various conclusions to the Gospel. If Mark originally ended with verse 8 of Chapter 16, then it would be the only Gospel that contains no accounts of Jesus' resurrection appearances.

## **LUKE**

When we turn to Luke we encounter a Gospel that is more like Matthew than it is like Mark. Both Luke and Matthew contain many teachings and parables of Jesus. Again, Luke presents the material in a distinctive arrangement and with special emphases. Chapters 1 and 2 present the accounts of the births of John the

Baptist and Jesus. In both accounts the mothers receive special attention. Luke uses poetic hymns rather than Old Testament quotations.

In the account of Jesus' birth Luke stresses the appearance of the angel to Mary, the trip to Bethlehem from Nazareth, and the appearance of the angels to the shepherds, who then visit the Christ Child. Luke does not refer to the star, the wise men, or Herod's persecution. Luke's account of Jesus' birth indicates some of Luke's major emphases: concern for women, interest in common people, and the universal significance of Jesus.

Read the familiar story of Jesus' birth in Luke 2:1-20, and answer these questions.

- a. Where in this story do you see evidence of Luke's special concern for women?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- b. Where do you see evidence of Luke's concern for common people?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- c. How does Luke emphasize the universality of Jesus in this story?

### **LUKE 6-18**

Throughout his Gospel, Luke includes sayings and teachings of Jesus that not only parallel Matthew but differ as well. In Luke 6 Jesus preaches his Sermon on the Plain—a sermon that parallels part of Matthew's Sermon on the Mount. Read Luke 6:20-22.

In Luke 9:51-18:34 we have a collection of special material found only in Luke's Gospel. In Luke, Jesus shares all these teachings and sayings during his journey to

Jerusalem. That journey took only one chapter in Mark. This special section in Luke contains much of the most familiar material in the New Testament. It includes such stories as the prodigal son, the lost sheep, and the lost coin.

The parable of the widow and the judge in Luke 18:1-8 appears only in Luke. After reading it, answer the questions below.

- a. What did Jesus intend to teach through this parable?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- b. In what way was the judge similar to God? dissimilar to God?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- c. What is the relationship between Jesus' words in verse 1 and verse 8?

### **SUMMARY**

Thus we see that Matthew, Mark, and Luke contain similar material about Jesus. But each Gospel writer gives special form to Jesus' story. To fulfill his own purposes, each writer emphasizes certain aspects about Jesus' life and ministry.

A few words summarize the perspective of each of the Gospel writers.

- (1) For Matthew, Jesus is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.
- (2) Mark focuses on the mighty acts of Jesus more than on his teachings.
- (3) Luke emphasizes Jesus' concern for women, interest in the common people, and universal significance of Jesus.



### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Matthew begins his Gospel by identifying Jesus as the Messiah (Christ). He then specifically mentions Abraham and David as Jesus' ancestors. Read Genesis 12:1-3 and 2 Samuel 7:18-26 as a review. Why do you think he mentioned these two Old Testament leaders in particular?

Matthew's Gospel closes on the note that salvation through Christ is open to all who will accept it. The kingdom of Jesus Christ is not of this world. But he does rule to this

day, and his reign is destined for eternity. What evidence do you see of this kingdom?

2. The temptations of Jesus are recorded in two of the Synoptic Gospels: Matthew 4:1-11 and Luke 4:1-13. Read these passages, then discuss with the group how the temptations illustrate the humanity of Jesus. Consider how Jesus' response to temptation can serve as an example to us. How do you respond to temptation in your life?

3. The Gospel of Mark portrays Jesus as the suffering servant. Read the Servant Songs in the Book of Isaiah: 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-11; and 52:13-53:12. What parallels do you see between Isaiah's suffering servant and Jesus? What does Jesus' suffering mean to us?

4. A variety of literature is found in the Gospels: parables, sermons, and biographical sketches. Which of these types of literature has been most helpful in

your life? Be prepared to share your answers with the class members.

### DAILY READINGS FOR JOHN

- Day 1: John 1:1-18
- Day 2: John 1:19-34
- Day 3: John 3:1-21
- Day 4: John 4:7-26
- Day 5: John 6:1-15
- Day 6: John 17:1-26
- Day 7: John 21:5-25