

The Gospels

I. The Meaning of Gospel in Layman's Terms

What is a Gospel? The term 'gospel' comes from the Old English term 'God-spell.' It translates the Greek word for 'good news.' One of the oldest uses of the word in the ancient world was by a king's herald, who announced the 'glad tidings' of the king's birthday as he went through the cities of the realm. This is just the meaning in our New Testaments. The four Gospels announce the glad tidings about Jesus. The ancient world knew about history, poetry, prophecy and letters. But a 'gospel' was new to them. Here, inspired writers wanted to do more than just relate historical detail. They also wanted to create faith (see John 20:30-31). They announced the good news that, just as the Old Testament had promised, God had sent His Messiah, Jesus, to the world.

Why are there four Gospels? Perhaps for the same reason different descriptions of a finely cut jewel would appeal to different people. Matthew describes one facet of the life of Christ, Mark another, and Luke a third. The Gospel is told from four different perspectives and from four different people.

How is Jesus presented in each of the Gospels?

Matthew presents Jesus as King.

Mark presents Jesus as Servant.

Luke presents Jesus as the Son of Man.

John presents Jesus as the Son of God.

What are the Synoptic Gospels? *Matthew, Mark and Luke.* These three Gospels are so much alike they are called the Synoptic ('see with' or 'see alike') Gospels. They all look at the life of Christ from a historical perspective. On the other hand, John's Gospel dwells more on the inner meaning of Jesus' life and teachings.

II. The Synoptic Problem

Definition: The Synoptic Problem is simply this, if you were to take a Gospel synopsis (a tool that views the parallel stories side by side) you would find two things that would interest you. First, the stories in some cases are verbatim (the same). The actual words are identical. Second, in some cases the stories are not verbatim and are actually very different.

Streeter's Hypothesis: The most commonly accepted and recognized hypothesis came from a British scholar by the name of B. H. Streeter and is often referred to as Streeter's Hypothesis. Sometimes it is called the Four Document Hypothesis. Streeter published his hypothesis in 1926. Streeter stated that Mark was the first Gospel written and that both Matthew and Luke used Mark in their writings. Luke also had a source which Streeter simply called "Q" ("Q" is the first letter of the German word for source).

