Comparing the Four Gospels

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| AUTHOR | AUDIENCE | PURPOSE | CHARACTERISTICS |
| MATTHEW (also called Levi; tax collector; one of the 12 disciples) | Jewish believers: Following Jesus is the true way a Jew continues to live as one of God’s people | Jesus is the promised Messiah: Teacher, Son of David, Son of Man, Son of God, Lord, wisdom, Immanuel | -focus on Jesus’ ministry in Galilee  -quotes extensively from OT  -alternates speech and narrative  -the only gospel to use the word “church”  -Jesus sent to Israel (10:5-6; 15:24); Disciples sent into all the world (28:18-20) |
| MARK (John Mark; Hellenist Jew; relative of Barnabas; connected to Peter- see 1 Peter 5:13) | Rome’s Jewish and Gentile believers (likely written in Rome) | Jesus is the suffering Son of God: Davidic Messiah, revealing who God is, holiness | -focus on Jesus’ ministry in Galilee  -urgency and speed (designed to be heard rather than read)  - grounds the good news of Jesus in Israel’s story  -compares behaviors of Jesus to others (disciples, opponents, crowds) |
| LUKE (possibly a Gentile proselyte, “God-fearer”; doctor- see Col 4:14; | Theophilus- high social status, Roman officer  Wider Audience- Jews and Gentile “God-fearers” | Jesus is the Savior for all people  Strengthen and confirm faith (1:4) | - focus on Jesus’ ministry in Galilee  -Jesus is the climax of salvation history  -Connects Jesus to OT paradigms: Messiah, prophet, Son of God, new Adam  -Emphasis on Holy Spirit  -much attention given to the poor, outcasts, oppressed  -written together with Acts |
| AUTHOR | AUDIENCE | PURPOSE | CHARACTERISTICS |
| JOHN (son of Zebedee; one of the 12; “the disciple whom Jesus loved”) | Jews outside the Holy Land and Jewish proselytes, “God-fearers” | Jesus is the Son of God- developed around 8 “signs”  \*very evangelistic | -begins with Jesus’ ministry in south (Jerusalem & Judea)  -structured references to Jewish festival days  -Jesus replaces/fulfills Old Covenant (tabernacle, temple, Passover, vine, Moses)  -uses repeated vocabulary (believe, love, world, send, Father) |

Remember:

Differences do not mean contradiction

Synoptic (“seeing together”) Gospels = Matthew, Mark, Luke, John

91% of Mark is found in Matthew

53% of Mark is found in Luke

Free borrowing was not plagiarism in this culture!

John and the Synoptics “interlock”- John explains several events from the Synoptics (example- Mark 14:58 and John 2:19). Features of John are explained in the Synoptics (example- John 18-19 explained by all 3)

A Four Gospel Comparison of the Christmas Story

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Purpose | Origins of Jesus | Audience heard: | Missing? |
| MATTHEW (1-2) | Jesus is the True King, descendant of David, fulfillment of prophecy | -Genealogy of Jesus, Son of David, Son of Abraham (includes sinners! Even women!)  -birth story from Joseph’s perspective | -fulfillment of OT prophecy  -true King born in ordinary circumstance  -God’s timing, God’s protection, God’s plan | -angel coming to Mary  -no room in the inn  -angels & shepherds |
| MARK (1:1-15) | Prepare the way for Jesus! | -baptized by John  -Spirit on him  -“You are my son”  -testing in the wilderness | -repent for the Messiah is coming/ has come  -Kingdom of God is here | -no account of Jesus’ birth |
| LUKE (1-2) | Identity and significance of Jesus and His mission | -Genealogy of Jesus, from Adam  -birth story from Mary’s perspective  -birth story of John the Baptist | -miraculous nature of Jesus’ birth  -witnesses are poor  -worship (angels, shepherds, Simeon, Anna)  -ties to OT (echoes of Hannah, Davidic covenant, psalms, Samuel) | -Magi  -Star  -Herod  -Egypt |
| JOHN (1:1-18) | Incarnation = God can be known | -Jesus is before the world, creator of the world, the Word | -the Word’s role in creation  -2 responses to the Word  -Jesus is greater than Moses | -no “story” of Jesus’ birth |

“Four different Gospel accounts and one conclusion- Jesus is sufficient. Intellectually, according to Matthew, the Christmas story is rooted in history. Morally, according to Mark, the Christmas story requires our repentance. Emotionally, according to Luke, the Christmas story invites our worship. And relationally, according to John, the Christmas story restores our relationship with God.”

“Four Accounts, One Savior” -Devotion from Pastor Petar Nenadov

“Matthew presents Jesus as the King of the Jews worthy of obedience and worship; Luke shows a humane Savior that brings good tidings and liberation to the poor, neglected and marginalized; Mark presents Jesus as Lord that serves in secret and thus shows a new way, free from the fight for supremacy and status; and finally, John present Jesus as God, who comes as the Word become flesh and this shines in the darkness to bring a new beginning in this world.”

“The Birth of Jesus in the NT: One Event- Four Narratives” – Dr Corne Baker