

Church of God

Sunday School

THE BIBLE — THE GOSPELS

DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** Jesus is the promised Messiah (Matthew 16:13-17).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** Jesus came preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:14-15).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** "Truly this man was the Son of God" (Mark 15:37-39).
- ❑ **Thursday:** Jesus is rejected in Nazareth (Luke 4:16-30).
- ❑ **Friday:** Jesus is the Word (John 1:1-14).
- ❑ **Saturday:** "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (John 20:24-29).



MEMORY VERSE: *"But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name."* —John 20:31

Good News

The first four books of the New Testament are called the "Gospels." The word *Gospel* means "good news," and these books tell the good news of Jesus Christ. All throughout the Old Testament people were told of the coming Messiah. Now, the Gospel writers proclaimed, "He has come!" After reading Isaiah's prophecy (Isaiah 61:1-3) concerning the coming Christ, Jesus said, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears" (Luke 4:21). Jesus came to fulfill (bring to completion) things "written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms" (Luke 24:44). The old covenant was imperfect, but Jesus brought about a "better covenant . . . established upon better promises" (Hebrews 8:6).

The first three Gospels are often referred to as the "Synoptic Gospels." They are a synopsis (a general view of the same subject) or a common outline of Jesus' life. They are very similar in wording and content. The last Gospel (John) does not cover many of the events we read of in the other Gospels. Some of the events John did not include were important: the Temptation of Jesus, the Transfiguration, and the Lord's Supper. John let us know that "many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book" (John 20:30). He wanted his readers to truly know who Jesus is, "and that believing ye might have life through his name" (John 20:31).

Why Do We Need Four Gospels?

The authors of these Gospels are believed to be Matthew (a tax collector), John Mark (a young Jewish man), Luke (a Gentile physician), and John (a fisherman). Because of these very different backgrounds, we find a variety of perspectives and purposes in their writings. Each Gospel focuses on different aspects of who Jesus is and why He came. Like the four parts in a musical chord, together all four authors provide a complete, harmonious picture of Christ.

When reading the Gospels, it is important to understand the background of the author, his background, and his intention. Matthew's Gospel tells the Jews that the promised King-Messiah (Zechariah 9:9) has come. He showed how Jesus fulfilled that prophecy (Matthew 21:4-5). Mark's Gospel was written for the Romans. He wrote of the Servant-Messiah, a Savior who came "to minister" to others (Mark 10:45). Luke's Gospel was written for the Greeks, and He described the Messiah as the Son of Man who came "to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). John's Gospel is for everyone (John 3:16). He told of the Son of God who came to give spiritual life (John 10:10), a personal Savior.

When Jesus was crucified, a superscription (a board with the charge against Jesus written on it) was placed above



**Superscription in
Three Languages**

His head on the Cross. This was written in three different languages—Hebrew, Latin, and Greek—the three main languages of that time. Likewise, we see a Gospel written to each of these cultures: Matthew to the Jews (Hebrew), Mark to the Romans (Latin), and Luke to the Greeks.

The Four Gospels

MATTHEW: it is fitting that this is the first book of the New Testament. This Gospel forms a bridge between the Old Testament (Messiah is coming) and the New Testament (Messiah has come). Matthew begins with a genealogical list (1:1-17), quotes the Old Testament (53 direct quotes and 76 allusions), and shows how Jesus was the prophesied Messiah ("son of David," 1:1; "King of the Jews," 2:2; "Son of the living God," 16:16). This book has been described as "written by a Jew, about a Jew, for the Jews." It has also been called "the

Sayings" because it has recorded many sayings of Jesus.

MARK: tradition tells us that the author of this book (believed to be John Mark, spoken of in Acts 12:12, 25 and Acts 15:37) worked with the Apostle Peter, often translating his preaching. Historians have referred to this book as "Peter's Gospel." The style of this Gospel is very similar to Peter's addresses (sermons) in Acts and Peter's two Epistles. Peter's personality seems to be reflected in this Gospel with the frequent usage of such words as "immediately" or "straightway" (41 times in the Greek form). Mark seemed to have Gentiles (non-Jews) in mind when writing, explaining in detail Jewish customs, words, and places (7:3-4; 13:3), things that would have been common knowledge to a Jewish audience.

LUKE: the author of this Gospel is believed to be "the beloved physician" (Colossians 4:14) who traveled with Paul (2 Timothy 4:11; Philemon 24). Luke, the only Gentile writer of the New Testament, is also credited with writing the Book of Acts. Both books are dedicated to Theophilus (believed to be a high ranking Roman official). Luke was the only Gospel writer to explain his reason for writing this Gospel (1:1-4). He intended to record an accurate account of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Luke was not an eyewitness to these events but is thought to have interviewed people who were eyewitnesses (including Jesus' mother Mary). The accuracy and eye for detail shows us that Luke's Gospel was written from a medical point of view. It was also written in the common Greek language. The non-Jewish audience Luke's Gospel was intended for would have been unfamiliar with many Jewish beliefs and practices.

JOHN: this book is said to have been written by John, the son of Zebedee, the brother of James. (John is also the author of three Epistles and the Book of Revelation.) John let us know the purpose of this book was to show Jesus as more than the Messiah. He is the "Son of God" (20:30-31). This book has been called "the spiritual Gospel," for it shows the heart of Christ. The word *world* is used 78 times in this Gospel (in the Greek language), letting us know the Son of God came to save "whosoever believeth in him" (3:16).

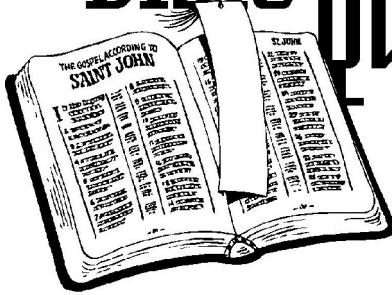
These Are Written So That You Can Believe

The stories, sermons, and sayings found in the Gospels are not complete biographies of Jesus (John 21:25), nor are they "cunningly devised fables" (2 Peter 1:16). Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, eyewitness accounts of the life and teachings of Jesus were preserved for us today. These writings have provided guidance to Christians throughout the ages (people who were sometimes called "followers of the Way"), teaching us how to live, speak, and tell others of this "Good News."

Do you have a favorite Gospel? Many people believe that a new Christian should read the Gospel of John first. Why might that be? Regardless of preference, why not make it a goal to begin reading through all the Gospels? You will find that the more you read about Jesus, the more real He will become to you!



Bible Quiz



1. What does the word *Gospel* mean? _____

2. What was the reaction in Luke 4:28-30 to Jesus' statement "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears"? _____

3. How is the Gospel of John different from the first three Gospels? _____

4. Why are the first three Gospels called "The Synoptic Gospels"? _____

5. Why was the superscription that was placed above Jesus' head written in three languages? _____

6. Each Gospel writer had an intended audience and portrayed Jesus a little differently. Fill in the audience and how each writer portrayed Christ:

Matthew wrote to the _____ about the _____ Messiah.

Mark wrote to the _____ about the _____ Messiah.

Luke wrote to the _____ describing Jesus as the _____.

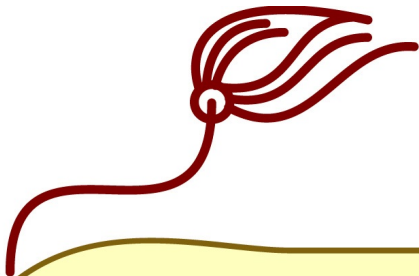
John wrote to _____ describing Jesus as the _____.

7. Why is the Book of Matthew sometimes called "The Sayings"? _____

8. Why has the Book of Mark been called "Peter's Gospel"? _____

9. How is Luke's education reflected in his writing?

10. What was John's purpose in writing the fourth Gospel? _____



A car accident is witnessed by four people: a father, a mother, a young daughter, and a teenage son. Discuss the possible differing viewpoints of the accident due to the age, background, and gender of each observer.

Compare this to the four Gospel writers and their different backgrounds. Why are multiple eyewitness accounts better than one? How might Deuteronomy 19:15 answer this question?