

The Bible in a Nutshell: The Gospels



The word "Gospel" comes from the Greek word εὐαγγέλιον, or "euangelion", which means "Good News". The Good News that it speaks of is the good news of the arrival of The Messiah, in Jesus Christ. We also get the word "Evangelist" from this root, one who delivers the Good News. The term was coined by the Apostle Paul in his epistle to the church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 15:1-9) The purpose of them is to convey the life and teachings of Jesus, so that people might believe in Him.

There are four accounts of the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. Three of them are referred to as the "Synoptic" gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke. "Synoptic" means "seen", or "read together", indicating that all three contain many of the same stories and teachings, and can be read and compared to one another. Of the three synoptic gospels, only one is written by one of Jesus' disciples. Matthew was one of Jesus' 12 disciples, but Mark and Luke were not.

The fourth gospel, John, is written less from a historical perspective, and more from a theological perspective. It too, contains Jesus' teachings, but approaches them from a more philosophical perspective.

Keep in mind that none of the four gospels claim to be a comprehensive history of Jesus. In fact, none of the gospel authors would even quite consider the gospels to be history. They make little or no attempt to nail down dates and times, and present very, very little of the historical context in which Jesus lived. Their purpose was to spread the GOOD NEWS of Jesus, that He is Lord and Savior of the world, and not to be a historical account. This DOES NOT mean that the gospels are not historical; for a historical account of Jesus' life, one needs to read the historian Josephus' account of the history of Palestine under the Roman occupation. But rather, their purpose is to reach out to people and make them into believers, by understanding WHO Jesus was and WHY he came into the world, so that people would be saved.

It is likely that all four of the gospels were originally related to people orally, and not written. The act of writing them down probably occurred as much as 20 years later, and perhaps they were written down by a scribe, rather than by the gospels author.

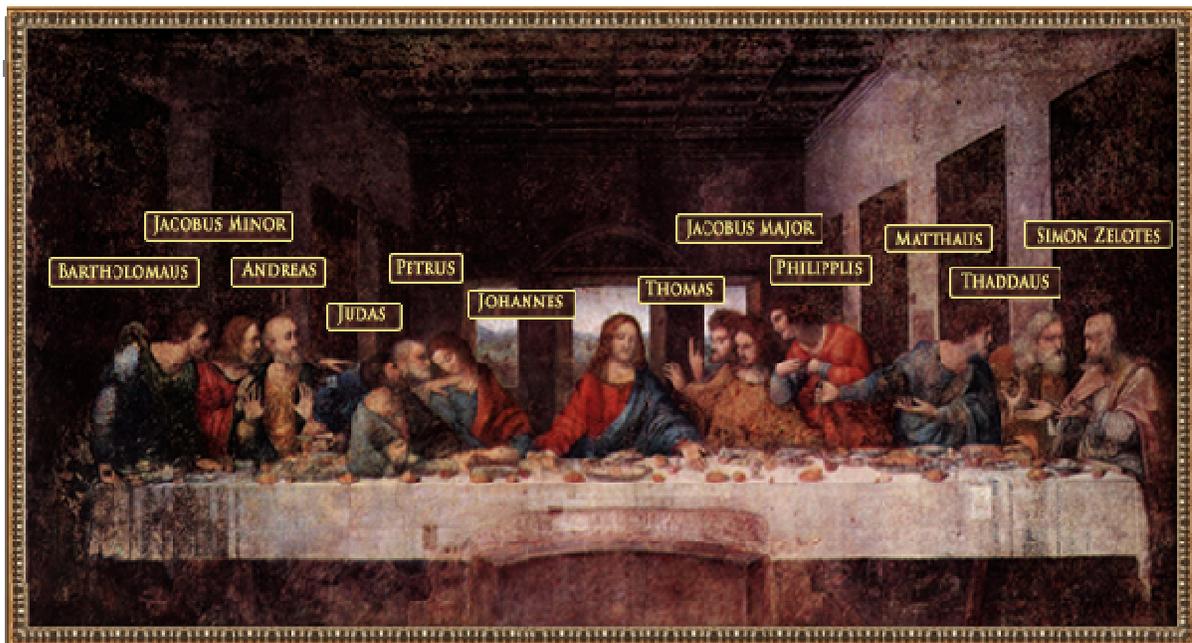
The Four Gospels

Matthew: Matthew was a Jewish tax collector who was one of Jesus' disciples. We know of his life that he abandoned a profitable tax collecting business in order to follow Christ. Matthew gives a more detailed account of Jesus' birth and early life, with a particular emphasis on showing that Jesus was the Messiah that had been spoken of by the Prophets in the Old Testament. Matthew is most often quoted for his recount of the Sermon on the Mount (the Beatitudes), and the care for the poor and the needy, and John the Baptist.

Mark: Mark was only a teenager when Jesus taught, he travelled with the group, but wasn't one of the twelve. Tradition has it that Mark was present in the garden of Gethsemane when Jesus was arrested, and was the one who slipped out of his tunic when the guards grabbed him and ran away. Mark's gospel is the shortest of the four, and presents a very straightforward narrative, unadorned and plain. The oldest copy of Mark's gospel may not have contained the last half of the last chapter.

Luke: Luke not only wasn't one of the twelve disciples, but he wasn't even Jewish. Luke was a doctor, a physician, and was Greek. He was fascinated by the story of Christ, and was a very early convert to the early Christian Church. He interviewed those who knew Jesus, and put together the most comprehensive of the four gospels, drawing from all the different sources at his disposal. His gospel was originally a much longer book that covered all of the early Christian church, but the early church fathers split it into two halves. The Book of Luke is the first half, and covers the life, death and resurrection just like the other gospels. The second half, all of which takes place after the resurrection, became The Book of Acts (or, The Acts of the Apostles). Luke, a well educated Greek scholar, was intensely interested in all the aspects of Jesus' life, especially the miraculous healings that took place.

John: One of two gospels written by one of the disciples, The Book of John offers a different perspective on Jesus. John emphasizes Jesus' divine nature and eternal origin. There are more miracles listed in John's gospel than any of the other gospels. John frequently employs figurative language to explain the divine concepts of Christ, helping the believer to understand the deeper concepts of Christ's teaching in a new way that leads to deeper understanding.



The Last Supper
by Leonardo DaVinci