

# How to Read the Gospel

Study Notes

## Introduction

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—known as “the Gospels”—contain some of the most familiar stories in the Bible. They offer the earliest accounts of Jesus’ life and teachings. But how often do we really take in their literary artistry from beginning to end? How can we reconcile the fact that there are four accounts with some differing stories? Our video How to Read the Gospels is all about learning to understand and respond to these unique books.

These notes go a level deeper than we can cover in a five-minute video. In the following pages, you’ll be introduced to key concepts and passages that will guide your exploration of the four Gospels.

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## What is the Gospel?

The word “gospel” (Old English: *god-spel*, meaning “good tidings”) comes from a Greek word (*euangelion*) that means “good news.” In the New Testament, Gospel refers to the announcement that Jesus has brought the reign of God to our world through his life, death, and resurrection from the dead.

*Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming **the good news** from God. “The time has come,” Jesus said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe **the good news!**”*

**Mark 1:14-15**

*\*Most Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible (NASB) with changes and emphasis added for understanding.*

Both Jesus and Paul derived this important word from the prophetic poetry of Isaiah (**Isaiah 52:7-10**) in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) where the future arrival of God’s Kingdom through the messiah is called “good news.”

*How lovely on the mountains  
Are the feet of him who brings **good news**,  
Who announces peace  
And brings good news of happiness,  
Who announces salvation,  
And says to Zion, “Your God reigns!”*

**Isaiah 52:7**

This word “good news” is used 66 times in Paul’s letters, and the verbs 21 times!

Romans 1:2 and 1 Corinthians 15:1-3 are his clearest definitions.

***The good news** ... regarding God’s Son, who descended from David in his physical lineage, and who was appointed by the Holy Spirit to be the Son of God in power through his resurrection from the dead: Jesus, the Messiah, our Lord.*

**Romans 1:2-4**

*Now I make known to you, brethren, **the good news** which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received:*

*that the Messiah died for our sins **according to the Scriptures**, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day **according to the Scriptures**, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared to me also.*

**1 Corinthians 15:1-8**

## What are the Gospels?

The Gospel narratives—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—are carefully designed theological biographies of Jesus that focus on his announcement of the Gospel. They are based on the eyewitness testimony of the apostles. However, they are not merely historical records. These accounts are designed to advance a claim that will challenge the reader’s thinking and behavior. The Gospel narratives have two main goals.

1. To faithfully represent the story of Jesus—the crucified and risen Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah of Israel and the true Lord of the world.
2. To persuade the reader to acknowledge Jesus as Lord and become his disciple.

The title of each Gospel account can also inform us about their purpose: “The Gospel, *according to* [Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John].” The four authors each frame Jesus’ story in a unique way for distinct purposes. We’ll explore those purposes later in these notes.

## Why the Title “Gospel”?

You may be wondering why these books called the Gospels. The answer is quite simple. Most scholars agree that the name derives from Mark’s usage of the word:

*The beginning of **the good news** about  
Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.*

**Mark 1:1**

## Gospels and Ancient Biography

The Gospels are a kind of ancient biography. Although this is a commonly recognized category of literature today, biographies in the ancient world had different strategies and aims. Take a look at some key differences.

- Ancient biographies were representations of the essence or meaning of a key figure’s life story and message—not a chronological play-by-play of life events.
- They were not archival or unbiased accounts. Rather, they intended to be persuasive documents.
- They were aimed at persuading the reader to emulate the figure—not just to gain knowledge about their life.

The four apostolic Gospels are theological, historical, and formational narrative biographies that retell the story and proclaim the significance of Jesus as Israel’s messiah and the Lord of all nations, the one who through the power of the Spirit is restoring God’s reign over all creation.

Jonathan Pennington, *Reading the Gospels Wisely*, 35.

## Four Unique Features of the Gospel Narratives

Although there are four different Gospel authors, the books maintain a certain cohesiveness and similarity of style. This is due to the following four features present in each Gospel.

### 1. References to the Hebrew Bible

Each of the Gospels claim that Jesus fulfills the Hebrew Bible's story. They prove their claim through constant reference to the Scriptures. We can assume each author had a high degree of familiarity with the Hebrew Bible by the way they refer to them throughout their writing.

- **Introductions:** Each of the four Gospel accounts begins with hyperlinks to various texts in the Hebrew Bible to show how Jesus is carrying the story of Israel and humanity to its climax:
  - Mark 1-2: Isaiah and Malachi, Genesis 1 and Daniel 7
  - Matthew 1: The genealogies of Genesis and 1 Chronicles
  - Luke 1: Genesis and Isaiah
  - John 1: Genesis 1 and Exodus 32-34
- **Direct Quotations:** For example, Matthew presents Jesus' healing ministry (Matt. 8:14-16) as a fulfillment of Isaiah's description of the suffering servant (Isa. 53:4)
- **Subtle Allusions:** For example, in Mark 1:9-11 Jesus is baptized and God announces from Heaven, "You are my beloved Son (Gen. 22:2), with you I am well-pleased (Isa. 42:1 & Ps. 2:7)." This sentence blends together phrases from three biblical texts to show that Jesus is the messianic servant king who is the seed of Abraham.
- **Narrative Parallels:** For example, Matthew presents Jesus as a greater-than-Moses figure by designing his story to match the basic outline of Moses' career.

### 2. Direct and Indirect Claims on Jesus' Identity

The Gospel authors sometimes make explicit claims about Jesus' identity (Mark 1:1, "The beginning of the gospel about Jesus, **the Messiah, the Son of God**"), but more often they shape the reader's perception of Jesus through indirect means.

- Narratives about Jesus performing signs and wonders, like when Jesus heals and forgives sins in Mark 2:7 and 12: "Who can forgive sins but God alone?"
- Narratives about Jesus' teaching—his speeches, parables, and dialogues—as in Matthew 7:24-27 when Jesus portrays himself and his community as the new Jerusalem temple.
- Testimonies of other characters:
  - **God:** "This is my Son" (Matt. 3:17)
  - **The disciples:** "What kind of man is this?" (Matt. 8:27)
  - **Demons:** "What do you want with us, Son of God?" (Matt. 8:29)
  - **People of Nazareth:** "Isn't this the carpenter's son?" (Matt. 13:55)
  - **Canaanite woman:** "Lord, Son of David!" (Matt. 15:22)
  - **Peter:** "You're the Messiah, Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16)

- **High Priest:** “Are you the Messiah, the Son of God?” (Matth. 26:63)
- **Pilate:** “Are you the King of the Jews?” (Matth.27:11)
- **Roman soldier:** “Surely this was the Son of God” (Matt. 27:54)

**Why not include more direct references to Jesus’ identity?** Each of the Gospel authors wants you to meet Jesus in these stories and experience him for yourself. Instead of simply making claims about Jesus (which is quite rare), the Gospel authors are more interested in you watching people respond to Jesus in the narratives so that you are forced to make your own decision about him (see John 20:30-31).

### 3. Crucifixion and Resurrection as the Climax of the Story

All four Gospels present Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection as the climax—not only of Jesus’ life, but of the entire biblical narrative. They do so by devoting significant narrative space to the stories surrounding these events.

- Mark allots 10 of 16 chapters (60%) to roughly three years of Jesus’ Kingdom announcement, and six chapters (30%) to the seven days Jesus spent in Jerusalem before his crucifixion.
- Jesus’ death is introduced early in Matthew (12:14) and is anticipated four times by Jesus himself (16:21, 27; 17:22-23; 20:18-19) as the moment where he will become king (27:37).

### 4. Different Arrangements to Emphasize Unique Facets of Jesus’ Character

While the four Gospels do claim to recount real historical events, each author has carefully edited, arranged, and designed the core stories about Jesus to emphasize unique facets of Jesus’ character. So what do each of the Gospels emphasize?

- Matthew portrays Jesus as a **greater-than-Moses figure** who fulfills the promises of the ancient Scriptures and whose resurrection has enthroned him as the King of Heaven and Earth.
- Mark emphasizes the mystery and misunderstanding caused by Jesus’ announcement of the Kingdom of God. He shows Jesus as **the unexpected Messiah** and highlights the paradox of how the exalted Messiah can only be recognized in the humiliated, crucified Jesus.
- Luke highlights how **Jesus brings the Gospel to the nations**. He shows Jesus empowered by the Holy Spirit to fulfill the Hebrew Bible's promise that God’s salvation would reach beyond Israel to include all nations.
- John introduces Jesus as **Israel’s God become human**, presenting signs that demonstrate the truth of his messianic claim and his offer of eternal life for any that will trust in him.

#### Exploring John’s Arrangement

Let’s take a deeper look into how one of the Gospel authors arranges his material to connect to unique facets of Jesus’ identity. In the opening of John, Jesus is placed in the role of creator of life and light—the divine Word of Genesis 1:1—and divine Wisdom of Proverbs 8. Take a look at how John weaves Hebrew Bible allusions to make his point.

John 1:1-13	Creation by Word and Wisdom
<p>1:1-2</p> <p><i>In the beginning</i> was the Word, and the Word was with God ... he was with God <b>in the beginning</b>.</p>	<p>Genesis 1:1 <b>In the beginning, God</b> created the skies and the land.</p> <p>Proverbs 8:22-23 Yahweh possessed me [wisdom] <b>at the beginning</b> of his way, before his works from of old. From ancient time I was established, <b>from the beginning</b> ...</p> <p>Proverbs 8:30 There I was beside him, as a master workman ...</p>
<p>1:3</p> <p><b>All things came to exist through him</b>, and apart from him not one thing came into existence which has come into existence.</p>	<p>Genesis 1:3, etc. (a total of 10 times in Genesis 1) And God said ...</p> <p>Proverbs 3:19 <b>By means of wisdom Yahweh founded</b> the land, by means of understanding he established the skies</p> <p>Psalm 33:6 <b>By means of the word of Yahweh the skies were made</b>, and by the breath of his mouth all their host.</p>
<p>1:4-5</p> <p>in him was life, and the life was <b>the light</b> of humanity. And the <b>light</b> was shining in darkness, and the darkness could not comprehend it.</p>	<p>Genesis 1:3-4 And God said, "Let there be <b>light</b>," and there was <b>light</b>. God saw that the <b>light</b> was good, and God separated the <b>light</b> from the darkness.</p>

John then moves to a different claim in John 1:14-18. He desires to connect Jesus to God's glorious temple presence (Exod. 33:18-23) and divine attributes (Exod. 34:6). Take a look at this intentional arrangement of material.

John 1:14-18	God's Presence and Attributes
<p>John 1:14a</p> <p>And the Word became flesh, and <b>dwelt</b> (Grk. ἐσκήνωσεν) <b>among us</b>, and we saw his glory (Grk. δόξα), glory as of the one and only from the Father ...</p>	<p>Exodus 25:8-9  <i>Have them make a sanctuary for me, that <b>I may dwell</b> (Heb. shakan) <b>among them</b>. According to all that I am going to show you, as the pattern of the tabernacle (Heb. mishkan; Grk. τῆς σκηνῆς) and the pattern of all its furniture, just so you shall construct it.</i></p> <p>Ezekiel 37:26-27  <i>I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an eternal covenant with them; and I will bless them and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary among them forever. <b>My dwelling place</b> (Heb. mishkan; Grk. κατασκήνωσις) <b>will be with them</b> and I will be their God and they will be my people.</i></p>
<p>John 1:14b, 16-17</p> <p>... <b>full of grace and truth</b> (Grk. πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας) ...  <i>For from his <b>fullness</b> we have all received, and <b>grace upon grace</b>. For the Torah was given through Moses; <b>grace and truth</b> were realized through Jesus Christ.</i></p>	<p>Exodus 34:6-7  <i>Yahweh, Yahweh, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and <b>full of covenant love and truth</b> ...</i></p>
<p>John 1:14b, 18</p> <p>and we saw his glory (Grk. δόξα), glory as of the one and only from the Father ... <b>No one has seen God at any time</b>; the one and only God who is in the bosom of the Father, he has explained ...</p>	<p>Exodus 33:20-22  <i>"But," he said, "you <b>cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.</b>" Then the LORD said, "There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. When my glory (Heb. kavod; Grk. δόξα) passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by."</i></p>

This is just one example of how John utilized the Hebrew Bible to make a claim about a specific aspect of Jesus' identity. The other Gospel authors employ the same strategy, but land on different points of emphasis. As we read each gospel, paying attention to the literary Genius of each author, we begin hearing the symphony of Jesus' identity.

## Three Skills for Reading the Gospels

As demonstrated in the previous section, the Gospel authors carefully designed their accounts. Let's not forget why. Each presents a persuasive portrait of Jesus so that you will acknowledge him as Lord and follow him. How can we learn to pay attention to the design and intention of each author? Here are three skills we think could help you.

### 1. Discover the Significance of Repeated Words and Ideas

The authors have woven their large-scale stories out of dozens of smaller stories about Jesus' teachings or miracles. They have linked them all together by means of key repeated words to highlight their themes. There are two steps that are helpful in discovering the significance of this feature.

**Step 1:** Look for the repeated words and ideas that connect the stories together.

**Step 2:** Ask, "What does the author want us to know about Jesus through these stories?"

Let's take a look at this skill in action. Can you observe how the following stories are linked together by repeated words and/or ideas?

#### Example 1: Luke 3-4

	Luke 3:21-22	Luke 3:23-38	Luke 4:1-13	Luke 4:14-32	Luke 4:33-41
<b>Step 1: Find the repeated idea.</b>	Jesus' baptism: declared to be God's "beloved Son"	Jesus' genealogy: linked back to Adam, "the son of God"	Jesus' wilderness testing: the Satan questions Jesus' identity as "Son of God"	Jesus is rejected by his hometown Nazareth: "Whose son is this?"	Jesus casts out demons who proclaim, "You are the Son of God"
<b>Step 2: What is the author doing?</b>	Luke has woven these stories together to emphasize how Jesus is the Son of God, Israel's Messiah, and humanity's representative. However, his identity is contested as some question, doubt, or even reject him.				

#### Example 2: Matthew 11-13

	Matthew 11:1-19	Matthew 11:20-30	Matthew 12	Matthew 13
<b>Step 1: Find the repeated idea.</b>	John the Baptist doubts whether Jesus is the Messiah	Jesus reacts to Israelite towns that reject him as the Messiah	Four stories of the Pharisees rejecting Jesus and one story of sick people accepting him as the Messiah (12:15-23)	Jesus tells a parable of the four soils
<b>Step 2: What is the author doing?</b>	Many people doubt or reject Jesus, but those who find themselves transformed by his grace accept him. Jesus then reflects on why there are such diverse responses to his message and challenges everyone to pay attention.			

## 2. Pay Attention to How Characters in the Story Respond to Jesus

Instead of telling you how to respond to Jesus, the Gospel authors use people's diverse reactions as a way of showing you how to—or how not to—react. For this reason, we recommend pausing after each short story to ask yourself two sets of questions:

1. How do the people in this story react to Jesus? What are their motivations? What are the results?
2. Do I see my own response to Jesus mirrored in these characters?

## 3. Read, Reread, and Reread Some More!

These Gospel accounts were designed to be read many times and eventually memorized. There are insights about Jesus and each author's message about him that you will only pick up after reading through these accounts multiple times and paying attention to repeated words and themes. Read slowly, then read fast, then slow again. You cannot immerse yourself in these four Gospels too much!

## The Formation of the Gospel Narratives

How were these books formed? The Gospel authors used pre-existing materials that had been passed down by authoritative eyewitness sources and authorized transmitters. Let's take a look at some biblical evidence of this formation. First, we can learn much from Luke's introduction to his Gospel, in which he explains how he went about writing.

*Inasmuch as many have undertaken to **compile** an account of the things accomplished among us, just as they were **handed down** to us by those who from the beginning were **eyewitnesses** and servants of the word ...*

**Luke 1:1-2**

Take a look at these three words emphasized above:

1. "Compile, draw up" (Grk. *anatassomai*: to compose, organize materials into a sequence)
2. "Handed down" (Grk. *paradidomi*: to pass on authorized traditions, cf. 1 Cor. 15:1-3)
6. "Eyewitnesses" (Grk. *autoptes*: reference to the original witnesses to the deeds and words of Jesus in the circle of the disciples; see 1 John 1:1-2)

There are several places in John's Gospel that give readers insight into the formation of the Gospels. First, it is clear that John acknowledges the existence and validity of other Gospel accounts.

*Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, **which are not written in this book**; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in his name.*

**John 20:30-31**

He also makes apparent the truthfulness of the eyewitness account of himself and others:

*This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and wrote these things, and we know that his testimony is true.*

**John 21:24**

## From Formation to Function

The use of the Gospel narratives by the apostles in the early Church bears witness to their formation and function. The earliest example of this is in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians. He instructs on the Eucharist by referencing the oral tradition of the Synoptic Gospels.

<b>Mark 14:22-25</b>	<b>Matthew 26:26-28</b>	<b>Luke 22:19-20</b>	<b>1 Corinthians 11:23-26</b>
While they were eating,	While they were eating,		For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which he was betrayed
Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take it; <b>this is my body.</b> ”	Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take and eat; <b>this is my body.</b> ”	And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, <b>“This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.”</b>	he took bread; and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, <b>“This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.”</b>
Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it. “This is <b>my blood of the covenant</b> , which is poured out for many,” he said to them.	Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. This is <b>my blood of the covenant</b> , which is poured out for many <b>for the forgiveness of sins.</b> ”	In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the <b>new covenant in my blood</b> , which is poured out for you.”	In the same way he took the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the <b>new covenant in my blood</b> ; do this, as often as you drink, in remembrance of me.”
“Truly I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”			

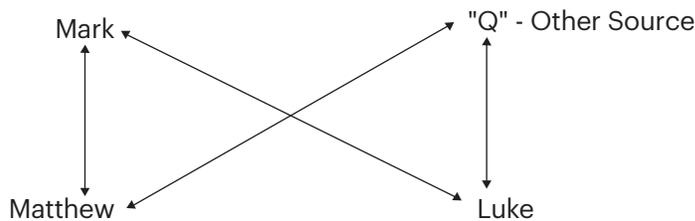
Paul was clearly familiar with the Gospel texts, using them as the authoritative source of his instruction. But why the subtle differences between the Gospel accounts? Aren’t they supposed to be recounting the same event? This brings us to our last topic—understanding the relationship between the Synoptic Gospels.

## Relationships Among the Synoptic Gospels

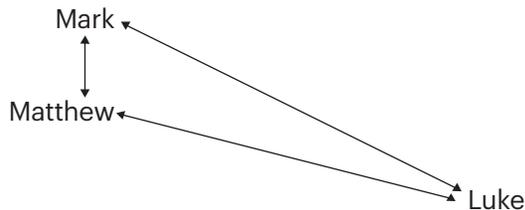
As you read through the Gospels, you may notice that Matthew, Mark, and Luke closely resemble each other. The common name for these three books are the “Synoptic Gospels”—meaning they were written from a similar perspective. They contain similarities in wording, order, and the selection of stories and quotations. Why this similarity?

The most likely explanation is that these authors—or more technically, compilers—were sharing a common source and/or using each other as a source for their material. So who wrote first? There are many theories, but here are the three most common:

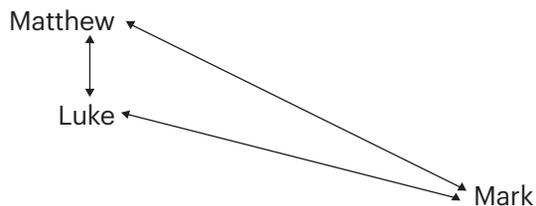
1. The Two-Source Theory: Mark wrote first, then Matthew and Luke used Mark. Matthew and Luke also used another common source—referred to as “Q.”



2. The Farrer Theory: Mark wrote first. Then Matthew used Mark. Then Luke later used Matthew and Mark.



3. The Griesbach Hypothesis: Matthew was the source of Luke. Then both were abbreviated by Mark.



Of the three main theories, two prioritize Mark as the first Gospel author. Today, most scholars agree that Mark indeed was the first Gospel writer. But regardless of who wrote first, we can learn more about the Gospel message from the similarities and differences between accounts. Here is a helpful breakdown of content categories in the Synoptic Gospels:

- Triple Tradition: Content included in Mark, Matthew, and Luke. For example, the feeding of the five thousand.
- Double Tradition: Content included in Mathew and Luke. For example, the Beatitudes.
- Special Matthew: Content unique to Matthew. For example, the visit of the Magi.
- Special Luke: Content unique to Luke. For example, the parable of the prodigal son.

When it comes to triple tradition and double tradition material, it is beneficial to compare the similarities and differences between passages. This enables us to better grasp why the author selected his material and his intended theological goal. This process is called “redaction criticism.” Let’s look at a few examples.

## Jesus Walks on Water

Our first example is from the double tradition story of Jesus walking on water. Notice how Matthew and Luke tell the same story yet differ in specific details. We can see here how authors are selective with their material in order to communicate a specific message. Each land on equally true yet different challenges for their audiences.

<p><b>Matthew 14:22-33</b></p> <p><i>Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him</i></p> <p><b>to the other side</b>, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them,</p> <p><i>he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray.</i></p> <p><i>Later that night, he was there alone, and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, <b>buffeted by the waves</b></i></p> <p><i>because the wind was against it. Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake.</i></p> <p><i>When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. “It’s a ghost,” they said, and cried out in fear.</i></p> <p><i>But Jesus immediately said to them: “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”</i></p> <p><b>“Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.” “Come,” he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!” Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. “You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?”</b></p> <p><i>And when <b>they</b> climbed into the boat, the wind died down.</i></p> <p><i>Then those who were in the boat <b>worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”</b></i></p>	<p><b>Mark 6:45-52</b></p> <p><i>Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him</i></p> <p><b>to Bethsaida</b>, while he dismissed the crowd. After leaving them,</p> <p><i>he went up on a mountainside to pray.</i></p> <p><i>Later that night, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was alone on land. <b>He saw the disciples straining at the oars,</b></i></p> <p><i>because the wind was against them. Shortly before dawn he went out to them, walking on the lake.</i></p> <p><b>He was about to pass by them,</b></p> <p><i>but when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost. They cried out, because they all saw him and were terrified.</i></p> <p><i>Immediately he spoke to them and said, “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”</i></p> <p><i>Then <b>he</b> climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down.</i></p> <p><i>They were completely amazed, for <b>they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.</b></i></p>
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## The Destruction of Jerusalem

In this triple tradition story, Jesus predicts the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem. This example demonstrates the harmony between each Gospel account. Take a look at the similarity between these passages, even though each author included details that would have been of note for their specific audience. For example, Matthew included a reference to the book of Daniel, since he was writing to a primarily Jewish Christian audience.

<p><b>Mark 13:14-15</b></p> <p><i>But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where it should not be</i></p> <p><i>(let the reader understand),</i></p> <p><i>then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains.</i></p> <p><i>The one who is on the housetop must not go down, or go in to get anything out of his house;</i></p>	<p><b>Matthew 24:15-17</b></p> <p><i>Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation <b>which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet</b>, standing <b>in the holy place</b></i></p> <p><i>(let the reader understand),</i></p> <p><i>then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains.</i></p> <p><i>Whoever is on the housetop must not go down to get the things out that are in his house.</i></p>	<p><b>Luke 21:20-21</b></p> <p><i>But when you see <b>Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is near.</b></i></p> <p><i>Then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains, and those who are in the midst of the city must leave, and those who are in the country must not enter the city;</i></p>
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## Jesus Heals the Leper

In this example, Matthew fits a story of healing found in Mark within his travel narrative section. However, you will notice Jesus is surrounded by crowds whereas the man approaches Jesus quietly in Mark’s account. Notice then how Matthew 8:4 is in tension with the narrative setting he’s created—Jesus says “tell no one” about a miracle he just performed in front of the crowds.

<p><b>Mark 1:39-45</b></p> <p><i>And he went into their synagogues throughout all Galilee, preaching and casting out the demons.</i></p> <p><i>And a leper came to Jesus, beseeching him and falling on his knees before him, and saying, “If you are willing, you can make me clean.”</i></p> <p><i>Moved with compassion, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, “I am willing; be cleansed.” Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed.</i></p> <p><i>And he sternly warned him and immediately sent him away, and he said to him, “<b>See that you say nothing to anyone;</b> but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.”</i></p> <p><i>But he went out and began to proclaim it freely and to spread the news around, to such an extent that Jesus could no longer publicly enter a city ...</i></p>	<p><b>Matthew 5:1, 8:1-4</b></p> <p><i>When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him.</i></p> <p><i>When Jesus came down from the mountain, <b>large crowds followed him.</b></i></p> <p><i>And a leper came to him and bowed down before him, and said, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.”</i></p> <p><i>Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, “I am willing; be cleansed.” And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.</i></p> <p><i>And Jesus said to him, “<b>See that you tell no one;</b> but go, show yourself to the priest and present the offering that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.”</i></p>
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This is a wonderful example of semantic inconsistencies overlooked by the author in light of a greater aim. Matthew’s greater intent was to demonstrate the arrival of the Kingdom of Heaven through Jesus’ public ministry of miracles and healings.

## Further Resources on How to Read the Gospels

It is a worthy task to explore the complexities of the Gospels through both casual reading and detailed comparative studies. Here are some resources that may help you on your journey!

- Ray Lubeck, *Read the Bible for a Change*.
- J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God's Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible*.
- Richard Burridge, *Four Gospels, One Jesus*.
- Mark L. Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus: A Survey of Jesus and the Gospels*.
- Jonathan Pennington, *Reading the Gospels Wisely: A Narrative and Theological Introduction*.
- Mark Goodacre, *The Synoptic Problem: A Way through the Maze (Understanding the Bible and Its World)*.
- Richard A. Burridge, *What are the Gospels?: A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography*.