

The Four Gospels: Some Comparative Overview Charts

Literary, Stylistic and Thematic Comparisons:

GOSPEL according to...	MARK	MATTHEW	LUKE	JOHN
<i>No. of chapters (verses/words)</i>	16 (678 / 11304)	28 (1071 / 18345)	24 (1151 / 19482)	21 (879 / 15635)
<i>Style of Greek</i>	grammatically poor	Semitic influenced	good, elegant, literary	simple, but highly symbolic
<i>Geographical Focus</i>	Galilean towns; some Gentile territory	Galilee, esp. mountains; Jewish areas	one long journey to goal: Jerusalem	multiple visits back & forth to Jerusalem
<i>Literary Features</i>	quick action ("immediately, and then") loosely connected episodes	five major discourses; well-organized sections of collected pericopes	stories often in pairs (esp. male/female characters); many more parables	"Amen, Amen, I say to you..."; irony; paradox; double-meanings
<i>Literary Introduction</i>	"Beginning of Good News" (1:1)	"Book of Genealogy" (1:1)	"Orderly Account" (1:1-4)	Cosmic Hymn (1:1-18)
<i>Gospel Beginning</i>	John the Baptist's preaching; Jesus' ministry begins (1:2-15)	Jesus as Emmanuel (1:2—2:23); "King of Jews" vs. King Herod	Elizabeth & Mary; parallel birth stories John Baptist & Jesus (1:5—2:52)	John Bapt. points to "Lamb of God"; first disciples come to Jesus (1:19-51)
<i>Inaugural Event</i>	Exorcism in Synagogue of Capernaum (1:21-28)	Sermon on the Mount: Fulfillment of Law (ch. 5—7)	Jubilee reading from Isa 61: Rejection at Nazareth (4:14-30)	Wedding Feast at Cana: first of Jesus' "signs" (2:1-11)
<i>Jesus' Major Opponents</i>	1- Pharisees & Herodians; 2- chief priests, scribes & elders	"scribes & Pharisees"; "hypocrites & blind guides"	unjust authorities (civil & religious); rich & corrupt people	"Jews" (esp. leaders in Jerusalem); Pharisees; High Priest Caiaphas
<i>Jesus' Last Words on the Cross</i>	"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (15:34)	(27:46 – same as in Mark)	"Father, forgive them..." (23:34); "You'll be with me in Paradise" (23:43); "Into your hands I commit my Spirit" (23:46)	"Behold your son; behold you mother" (19:26-27); "I am thirsty" (19:28); "It is finished" (19:30)
<i>Focus of Passion</i>	Ch. 14—15: Jesus' death as tragedy	Ch. 26—27: plots & treachery vs. Jesus	Ch. 22—23: Jesus' innocence	Ch. 18—19: Jesus' exaltation
<i>Last Major Event</i>	Empty Tomb, outside of Jerusalem (16:1-8)	Great Commission, on Mountain in Galilee (28:16-20)	Ascension, from Bethany just East of Jerusalem (24:50-53)	1: disciples & Thomas (20:19-29) 2: [Peter & Beloved Disciple (21:1-23)]
<i>Final Literary Ending</i>	women leave tomb in fear & silence (16:8) [16:9-20 added only later]	Jesus tells disciples, "I am with you always" (28:20)	disciples return to Jerusalem temple with joy praising God (24:53)	1: many more signs (20:30f) 2: [many other books 21:24f]
<i>Christology I: Main Titles for Jesus</i>	Christ/Messiah & Son of God; Suffering Son of Man; Eschatological Judge	Son of David & Son of Abraham; Great Teacher; New Lawgiver (like Moses)	Great Prophet; Lord (of all nations); Savior (esp. of the poor)	Eternal Logos; Divine Word made Flesh; Unique Son, sent from the Father; Passover Lamb; "Equal to God"; "I Am"
<i>Christology II: Jesus' Major Actions</i>	miracles; overcoming evil powers; arguing with religious authorities	teaching his disciples; decrying religious hypocrisy	healing sick & impaired people; forgiving sinners & debtors	speaking God's words; doing God's works; revealing God and himself
<i>Discipleship</i>	persevere in faith despite suffering; follow Jesus "on the way" to the cross; be ready for his return	be righteous; forgive always; live the Golden Rule; fulfill God's laws, esp. law of charitable deeds	leave everything to follow Jesus; share with poor; accept everyone, esp. outcasts, women, enemies	see, believe, know, remain in Jesus & God, despite hostility; love one another; be in unity; serve humbly
<i>Pneumatology</i>	Holy Spirit at Baptism; unclean spirits	H.S. at Jesus' birth, baptism, speech	Infancy narrative; prophetic anointing	Spirit of Truth; Paraclete/Advocate
<i>Eschatological Expectations</i>	imminent & sudden, but no one knows when; so "Keep awake!" (13:1-37)	false prophets will arise; many will fall away; Gospel must first be preached to all (24:10-14)	after Jerusalem is destroyed and Gentiles' time is fulfilled; not so soon; pray! (21:20-24, 28, 36)	realized eschatology; all who hear & believe have eternal life already now, and are not judged (5:21-25)
<i>Basis for Final Judgment</i>	whether you persevere in faith despite persecutions (13:13)	what you do for "the least" people; Sheep & Goats parable (25:31-46)	how you use wealth / possessions; parables of Rich & Poor (16:1-31)	whether or not you believe in Jesus (3:16-18; 5:19-24; 12:44-50)
<i>Other Major Themes</i>	Messianic secret; main disciples don't understand, but minor characters do believe	fulfillment of Scripture; divisions within the community; final separation of good vs. bad	fulfillment of God's plan; eschatological reversal; tax collectors & sinners favored	"eternal life" = "life in his name" = "becoming children of God"; Xn unity; mutual indwelling of God/Jesus/us
Symbol – Feast – Lectionary	Lion – April 25 – Year B	Angel/Human – Sept. 21 – Year A	Ox – Oct. 18 – Year C	Eagle – Dec. 27 – esp. Lent & Easter

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Historical Background Issues:

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WHO: traditionally attributed author?	"John Mark of Jerusalem" (Acts 12:12; 15:37; Col 4:10; Phlm 1:24; 1Pet 5:13)	tax collector & apostle (Mark 3:18; Matt 9:9; 10:3; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13)	physician & companion of Paul (Col 4:14; 2Tim 4:11; Phlm 1:24)	John, son of Zebedee; one of 12 apostles (Mark 1:19; 3:17; cf. John 21:2)
WHO: implied author?	bilingual (Aramaic & Greek) second generation Christian; "young man" of 14:51-52?	bilingual (Aramaic & Greek) early Jewish Christian; trained "scribe" of 13:52?	Gentile Christian convert; educated Greek "historian"; client of Theophilus (1:1-4)?	the "beloved disciple" & his Jewish-Christian followers (John 19:35; 21:20-25)
TO WHOM: implied audience?	mostly Gentile Christians, fairly new in their faith, and facing persecutions	better educated Jews who already believe in Jesus, but argue over the Law	wealthier Gentile Christians in urban settings, in danger of becoming complacent	very mixed: originally Jews; later also Samaritans, Gentiles, etc.
WHERE: written from and/or to?	probably Rome; possibly Decapolis, Syria, Alexandria	possibly Galilee; probably in or near Antioch in Syria	probably Greece; possibly Syria (Pauline missions)	traditionally Ephesus; maybe originally Galilee or Syria
WHEN: approximate date?	very late 60's or early 70's (first written "Gospel")	late 70's or 80's (core text by Matthew?)	mid to late 80's (with "many" earlier sources)	main edition 90's (early edition 50's ?)
WHAT: subtype of "Gospel" genre?	narrated "good news" (1:1) about Jesus and his actions	a book of "heritage" (1:1) & much "teaching" (28:20)	an "orderly account" to attain "secure knowledge" (1:1-4)	"testimony" and "signs" for believing (20:30f; 21:24f)
WHY: community circumstances & author's purpose?	to encourage a community undergoing difficult trials and persecutions	to teach a community that has internal divisions and external enemies	to challenge believers to put their faith into practice more fully	to strengthen the identity of a group ostracized by other Jews for their faith

Structural and Geographical Comparisons:

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Introduction: Literary Preface Genealogy Infancy Narrative	1:1 1:1 ("good news") xxx xxx	1:1—2:23 xxx 1:1-17 1:18—2:23	1:1—2:52 1:1-4 ("orderly account") [3:23-38] 1:5—2:52	1:1-18 (prologue) 1:1-18 ("Word of God") xxx [1:14]
Preparatory Episodes: John Baptist's Preaching Baptism of Jesus Temptation of Jesus	1:2-13 1:2-8 1:9-11 1:12-13	3:1—4:11 3:1-12 3:13-17 4:1-11	3:1—4:13 3:1-20 3:21-22 4:1-13	1:1-51 1:19-36 [1:31-33] xxx
Jesus' Early Ministry, mostly to Jews in Galilee: Initial Preaching Call of First Disciples Outside of Galilee	1:14—8:21 1:14-15 1:16-20 5:1-20; 7:24—8:13	4:12—16:12 4:12-17 4:18-22 8:28-34; 15:21-28	4:14—9:17 4:14-30 5:1-11 8:26-39; xxx	[Ch. 2A, 4, 6] xxx 1:35-51 xxx
On the Way to Jerusalem Initial Stages 1st Passion Prediction 2nd Passion Prediction To Jerusalem Itself 3rd Passion Prediction	8:22—10:52 8:22—9:50 8:31-33 9:30-32 10:1-52 10:32-34	16:13—20:34 16:13—18:35 16:21-23 17:22-23 19:1—20:34 20:17-19	9:18—19:27 9:18-50 9:22 9:43b-45 9:51—19:27 18:31-34	[xxx] [7:1-9] xxx xxx [2:13; 5:1; 7:10] xxx
Ministry in Jerusalem Teachings & Disputes Eschatological Discourse	11:1—13:37 11:1—12:44 13:1-37	21:1—25:46 21:1—23:39 24:1-36	19:28—21:38 19:1—21:4 21:5-36	[Ch. 2B—3, 5, 7—12] most of this xxx
Passion Week Last Supper Crucifixion	14:1—15:47 14:17-31 15:22-41	26:1—27:66 26:20-35 27:33-56	22:1—23:56 22:14-38 23:33-49	13:1—19:42 13:1—17:26 19:17-37
Resurrection Narrative Empty Tomb Story Appearance Stories Additions	16:1-8 16:1-8 xxx [16:9-20 added later]	28:1-20 28:1-8 28:9-10, 16-20	24:1-53 24:1-12 24:13-53	20:1-31 20:1-13 20:14-31 21:1-25 [second ending]