



# New Testament

## Chapter 2

### The Synoptic Gospels and Acts (Part 1)



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## Chapter 2

# The Synoptic Gospels and Acts (Part 1)

*In this section, which is to lead us into a better understanding of the Synoptic Gospels, we will once again present, and deepen our understanding of, the Synoptic Question or the Synoptic Problem. We will present various solutions to the problem, or to put it another way, present various answers to the question.*

## 2.1 The Synoptic Problem

### 1. The Synoptic Gospels

#### 1.1 What are the Synoptic Gospels?

Since the end of the eighteenth century, the three Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke have been referenced as the “Synoptic Gospels”. People began to take advantage of the opportunity to print their texts in columns next to one another in order to determine identical parts, similarities, and differences in a kind of “overall view”. The Gospel of John is not included, because it diverges so strongly from the other Gospels.

Instead of using the full term “Synoptic Gospels”, people sometimes use the simpler term ‘Synoptics’.

#### 1.2 The Synoptic Problem

We are confronted with the question as to how the Synoptic Gospels are dependent on one another.

The term ‘synoptic’ derives from the Greek word **synopsis**, which means “seen together”, and is comprised of the two Greek words:

- *syn* = “at the same time, together”
- *opsis* = view (from *horao* = “to see”).

The Synoptic Question results from observations about the commonalities and differences between the Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

They coincide in terms of structure, subject matter, language, and quite frequently even wording. However, there are also numerous differences. The “greater Gospels” of Matthew and Luke are far more exhaustive in scope than Mark. While they have a great deal in common, they also diverge



strongly from one another in other respects. The Gospel of John constitutes a unique case. Its material, language, structure, and subject matter are too different from the Synoptic Gospels (despite many a parallel that suggests that John was familiar with Synoptic traditions).

### 1.3 Commonalities between Matthew, Mark, and Luke

The Synoptic Gospels have the same rough outline. They have the following elements in common:

- the emergence of John the Baptist
- the baptism of Jesus
- Jesus' stay in the wilderness
- the activity of Jesus in Galilee
- the Passion
- the resurrection

#### 1.3.1 Sequence of individual passages

In some sections, the sequence of the narratives is the same in all three Gospels:

The healing of a paralytic	Mark 2: 1-12	Matthew 9: 1-8	Luke 5: 17-26
Call to discipleship / supper of tax collectors	Mark 2: 13-15	Matthew 9: 9-13	Luke 5: 27-32
The question of fasting	Mark 2: 18-22	Matthew 9: 14-17	Luke 5: 33-39
Plucking grain on the Sabbath	Mark 2: 23-28	-	Luke 6: 1-5

The healing of a paralytic, the call to discipleship / the supper of tax collectors, the question of fasting, and the plucking of grain on the Sabbath all have the same sequence in all of the Synoptic Gospels.

#### 1.3.2 Wording

In some Bible passages, the Synoptic Gospels even coincide in terms of the specific wording:

- Matthew 9: 6  
“But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins’—then He said to the paralytic...”
- Mark 2: 10  
“But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins’—He said to the paralytic...”
- Luke 5: 24  
“But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins’—He said to the man who was paralysed...”



## 1.4 Differences between Matthew, Mark, and Luke

In addition to the many commonalities, there are also differences between the Synoptic Gospels, especially at the beginning and end of them.

### 1.4.1 Differences at the beginning of the Gospels

In the Gospel of Mark, there are no “childhood stories”. This Gospel begins directly with John the Baptist, the baptism of Jesus, and the temptation of Jesus.

Both Matthew and Luke do record “childhood stories”, but with differing content:

- the wise men from the Orient
- the flight of Jesus’ family to Egypt, and
- Herod’s slaughter of the innocents

... are only to be found in Matthew;

- the narrative about the twelve-year-old Jesus in the temple
- the story of Simeon and Anna, and
- a narrative about the birth of John the Baptist

... are only to be found in Luke.

### 1.4.2 Differences at the end of the Gospels

The accounts of Jesus’ appearing at the end of the Gospels are also very different.

- Only the Gospel of Luke makes reference to the disciples of Emmaus.
- Only in Matthew do we find the Great Commission.

## 2. Preliminary stages in solving the Synoptic Question / Problem

### 2.1 Augustinian Hypothesis

This hypothesis maintains that the Gospels came into being in their canonical sequence, which means that Matthew would be the oldest Gospel and the Gospel of Mark would be an abridged version of it, while Luke would represent an expansion of the Gospel of Mark. A modified use hypothesis in canonical sequence was advocated in around 1900 by Theodor Zahn (*Introduction to the New Testament*, 2 volumes) and Adolf Schlatter. Modern New Testament scholars are rather sceptical of this hypothesis, namely because it does not explain why Mark would have left out certain parts of Matthew (for example, the Sermon on the Mount).

The theologian Johann Jakob Griesbach († 1812) proposed an hypothesis that maintained that Mark made use of both the Gospels of Matthew and Luke and shortened them.



This is known as the Griesbach Hypothesis. It is still advocated by a few in the USA as an explanation for the Synoptic Question.

## **2.2 Protogospel Hypothesis (Gotthold Ephraim Lessing)**

This hypothesis states that there was a written Hebrew or Aramaic “protogospel” at the start of the whole Gospel tradition, and that various versions of it were in circulation or had already been translated into Greek. Accordingly, the three Synoptic Gospels derive from these protogospels, and independently from one another. The most significant proponent of this hypothesis is Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. The question of where all the specific matches in wording come from remains unsolved with this approach, however.

## **2.3 Tradition Hypothesis (J.G. Herder)**

The orientalist and theologian J.G. Herder advocated the view that the Gospels developed independently of one another, and that they drew from an oral tradition. By this we understand the records handed down by the early Christians, for example, the early disciples and others in Jesus’ surroundings. This theory is not sound either, because the many matches in wording among the Gospels would have to be derived from written sources.

## **2.4 Fragment/Diegesis Hypothesis (F.D.E. Schleiermacher)**

This hypothesis assumes that the Gospels are comprised of a large number of originally independent, small written collections (“diegeses”) of individual narratives. The problem with this idea is that only very few people of the time were able to write, so who would have written all of these little written fragments?

## **3. The two-source Hypothesis**

The aforementioned hypotheses did not lead to an answer to the Synoptic Question that would have been acceptable to all, however! There are too many uncertainties and open questions that remain.

It was for this reason that the Two Source Hypothesis developed in the nineteenth century. The main prerequisite for this hypothesis is the recognition that the Gospel of Mark is the oldest of the Synoptic Gospels, a concept known as “Marcan Priority”.

### **3.1 Marcan Priority**

Karl Lachmann, a professor for ancient languages, argued in the year 1835 that the Gospel of Mark must be the oldest. He concluded this for the following reasons:

- only a few fragments of the Gospel of Mark (only 5 %) are missing in Matthew and Luke. Both of these have adopted nearly the entire Gospel of Mark.
- Luke and Matthew have adopted the same sequence of fragments from the Gospel of Mark.
- this logically leads to the assumption that the Gospel of Mark would have been written before the others.



This means that Matthew and Luke made use of the Gospel of Mark. **The Gospel of Mark is thus the FIRST source of the Two Source Hypothesis.**

### 3.2 The *logia* source

The second source for the Two Source Hypothesis is something known as the **Logia source**. This theory was established by the philosopher and theologian Christian Hermann Weisse († 1866). Weisse discovered that:

- the Gospels of Matthew and Luke have many fragments in common, which are not to be found in Mark. Therefore Matthew and Luke must also have drawn from another (second) source.

This second source is known as the...

- Logia source or
- Q Sayings Gospel or
- Q Document

The letter “Q” (for German *Quelle* = “source”) has been used as a scientific abbreviation for the Logia source since the year 1890.

### 4. Assumptions about Q

Since it is a hypothetical source, “Q” does not exist in manuscript form, but can only be indirectly derived from Matthew and Luke. For this reason, even the reconstruction of Q remains hypothetical.

- Q is dominated by sayings of threat and admonition, however there are also parables and miracle narratives (the captain of Capernaum).
- There is no account of the Passion in Q.
- Therefore Q is not a Gospel, but rather a collection of accounts of Jesus’ words and deeds.
- These accounts comprise an independent literary and theological profile in Q, and are thus structured.
- Q was composed in the Greek language.
- It is hardly possible to **date** Q. It likely came into being between AD 50 and AD 60. There is an earlier dating (AD 40-50) and a later dating (around AD 70).
- Its place of composition was likely Palestine, probably Galilee.

The focus of Q is Jesus, who

- proclaims the message of the rule (kingdom) of God as a prophetic teacher of wisdom
- is awaited as the returning Son of Man.

### 5. Problems with the two-source hypothesis

The Two Source Hypothesis explains the majority of the interconnections within the Synoptic Gospels, but not all:



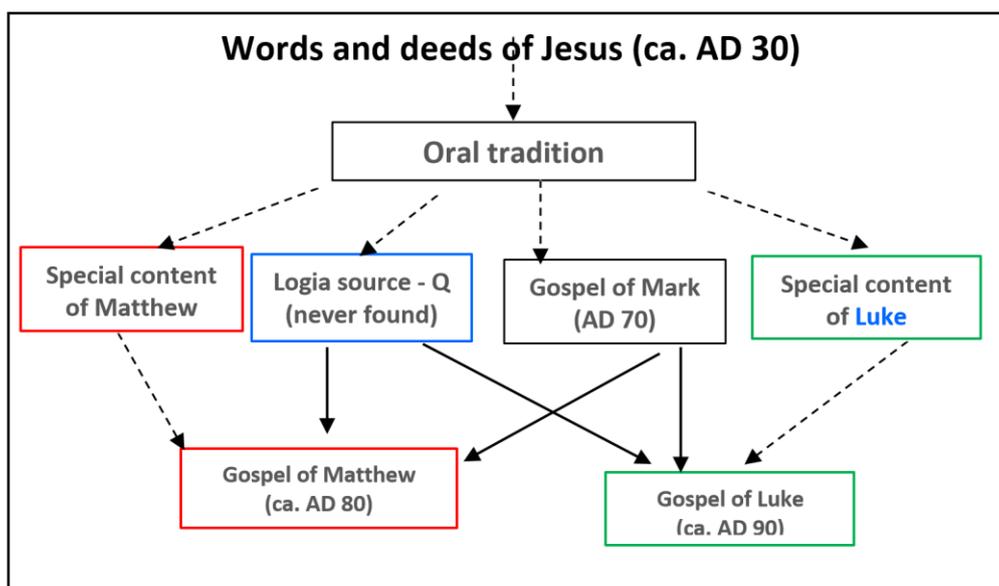
- Matthew and Luke take fragments from the Gospel of Mark and change their content in the same way (the technical term for this is “minor agreements” between Matthew and Luke, as opposed to Mark).
- Matthew and Luke both leave out some material from Mark (for example Mark 4: 26-29; 8: 22-26).

There has been no definitive explanation for these two problems to date.

**Things to know: The Two-Source Hypothesis**

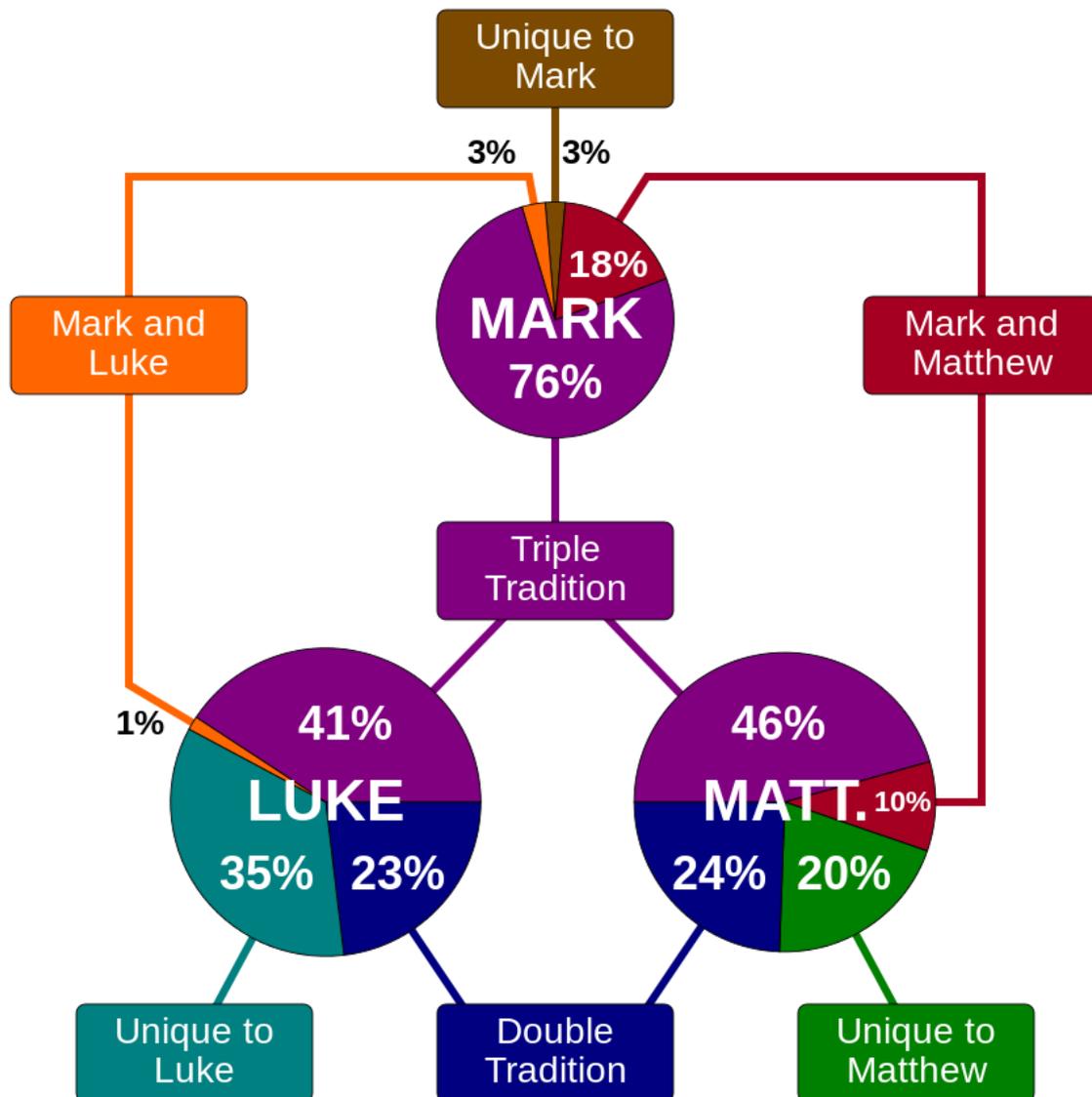
- The Gospel of Mark is the oldest of the Gospels (Marcan Priority).
- Matthew and Luke both made use of the Gospel of Mark independently of one another.
- Beyond that, Matthew and Luke also incorporated a collection of words of Jesus which no longer exists. It is described as Q Sayings, Q Document, or most often as the Logia Source (derived from the Greek word for “saying”, logion). The letter “Q” is used as an abbreviation for this.
- In addition to Mark and Q, Matthew and Luke also resorted to their own special content:
  - Traditions that were only accessible to one of the two evangelists. This special content cannot be traced back to any source manuscript, however. It consists of various individual traditions (it is for this reason that some scholars do not speak of a Four Source Hypothesis).

Pictorial representations of the Two Source Hypothesis and the development of the Gospels.





## Relationships between the Synoptic Gospels



(Source: Wikipedia)



## 2.2 The gospel and the Gospels

*We had already mentioned the genre of “gospel” in our discussion of exegetical methods. What comprises this genre? Are there parallels? Where does the term ‘gospel’ even come from? If there really is only a single gospel of Jesus Christ (cf. Galatians 1: 11-12), then why are there four Gospels in the New Testament canon? Are there still other Gospels outside of the New Testament? These are the questions to which we will turn our attention in the following.*

### 1. The term ‘gospel’

Where does the term ‘gospel’—or *euangelion* [εὐαγγέλιον], as it is known in Greek—come from? It has two roots:

- one of them is in Greco-Roman—that is, Hellenistic—literature,
- the other is in the Greek translation of the Old Testament.

#### 1.1 Origins in Greco-Roman literature

The term ‘gospel’ is a contraction of Old English ‘god spel’, meaning “glad tidings” or “good news”, which is comparable in meaning to the aforementioned Greek term, which likewise denoted a glad message. The word was also used in reference to the reward given to a messenger, for example by Homer (cf. the *Odyssey* 14: 52 et seq.; 166 et seq.).

The Greek term *euangelion* [εὐαγγέλιον] was used on very different occasions, as the following examples will demonstrate:

- in the Roman cult of the emperor, the birthdays and celebrations of the Caesar’s ascension to the throne were known as *euangelia*, in other words “glad tidings”. Joyful messages of a private nature were also referenced using this term (Cicero, *ad Atticum* II, ep. 3: 1: “*primum, ut opinor, euangelia*”—meaning “First of all, so I assume, I have good news”).
- the ascension to the throne of the new Emperor Vespasian in the year AD 69—after the disastrous reign of Nero and the turmoil of the Year of the Four Emperors (AD 68-69)—was also described as *euangelion*.
- the deification of the emperor after death (a process known as “apotheosis”) was likewise celebrated as *euangelion* (Latin: *bonum nuntium*). Seneca, the well-known philosopher of the imperial Stoic period, once wrote a satire based on this notion of deification (“*The apocolocyntosis* [*“pumpkinification”*] of Emperor Claudius”).



- the parliament of the Roman province of Asia, with its seat in Ephesus, announced the *euangelion* of the birthday of Emperor Augustus on the 23rd of September as the beginning of the new year. From then on, the year would begin on that date. A stone engraving known as the Priene Inscription, which contains this new resolution for the calendar from the year 9 BC, calls the news of the birthday of Emperor Augustus *euangelion* (“glad tidings”).

## 1.2 Origins in the Old Testament

In the Old Testament, the term *euangelion* has the additional meanings of “news of victory” or “messenger’s reward”. In its Greek translation, it seldom uses the noun *euangelion* (= gospel). Most often, the word exists in its plural form (*euangelia*).

By contrast, the verb *euangelizo* (= to proclaim a glad message) is of central significance in the prophetic book of Isaiah.

- Isaiah 52: 7  
“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace, who brings glad tidings of good things, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion ‘Your God reigns!’”

The messenger of joy mentioned in the book of Isaiah is identified with Jesus Christ in the New Testament.

Philo and Josephus (the two most important Judeo-Hellenistic authors) also adopt the Graeco-Roman use of *euangelion*, however, they only use it in reference to the Roman emperor, and never in reference to any Jewish personages such as Jesus.

### Things to know: gospel / *euangelion*

The English term ‘gospel’ is a contraction of Old English ‘god spel’ (“glad tidings”), which is a translation of the Greek term *euangelion* [εὐαγγέλιον]. This word in turn can be taken to mean “messenger’s reward”, “tidings of victory, or “good news”.

Today we understand the term ‘gospel’ as the good news of Jesus Christ.

## 2. Gospel as a literary genre

The four Gospels are a literary genre of their own within the New Testament. Other such genres include historical monographs (Acts), epistles (the apostolic letters), and apocalypses (Revelation).

The Gospels were originally handed down anonymously. Their authors were not known. In accordance with the ancient tradition of not captioning books with titles, the Gospels are anonymous. It was only in the second century AD that titles were assigned to the four Gospels in order to distinguish them from one another.



The early Christian theologian Justin († AD 165) was the first to list four Gospels. It is presumed that he simply adopted the titles from a list in the library in Rome.

Nevertheless, the Gospels were not called “**The Gospel of Mark**”, for example, but rather the “**Gospel according to Mark**”.

The designation “Gospel according to Mark” thus simply meant that there were also other Gospels, and that this Gospel had something to do with a man by the name of Mark, who is considered the author of this Gospel.

The same holds true for all the Gospels.

## 2.1 The Gospel of Mark as a book

The literary genre of Gospel as a book can likely be traced back to the Gospel of Mark. It is presumed that at the beginning of the Gospel of Mark—“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God”, was added **Gospel according to Mark**, sometime in the second century AD. A Gospel is not a biography, but rather a text proclaiming and professing Jesus as the Christ. A Gospel is thus a new and independent genre within ancient literature

All other genres of the New Testament (historical monographs, epistles, and apocalypse) already existed beforehand among Greek, Roman, and Jewish authors.

## 2.2 Attempts at deriving the Gospel genre

The fact that Gospel manuscripts were now regarded as a new genre did not mean that they were independent of Hellenistic literature. In the golden age of form criticism, it was still thought that the Gospels were part of the “small literature” of the period, but the picture began to change with the increasing redaction historical research conducted after the Second World War. So it was that the evangelists were no longer regarded as mere preservers of (oral and/or written) tradition, of folk literature, but as independent authors working with a theological concept.

The question of which ancient genres influenced the Gospel genre remains in dispute. Biographies of ruling personages (such as the “Parallel Lives” by Plutarch [ca. AD 45-120]) were widely distributed in antiquity, which is why ancient Hellenistic biographies are popularly used as comparative reference material in more recent research. The historical and biographical statements they contain, combined with their predilection for proclamation, are quite comparable to the content of the Gospels.

Aretologies (“deed narratives”), which are biographical texts concerning the miraculous deeds of outstanding personalities of antiquity, such as Apollonios of Tyana (*Life of Apollonius of Tyana*) or *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars* (Suetonius), are similar to the Hellenistic biographies. Therefore an influence on the Gospels was assumed.

Attempts were also made to derive the Gospel genre from the Old Testament. For example, the Old Testament scholar Klaus Baltzer conceived of the prophetic biographies (Elijah, Elisha) as a template for the genre (Klaus Baltzer: *Die Biographie des Propheten* [The biography of the prophets]. Neukirchen 1975).



Dieter Lührmann, who picked up on this same thesis, adapted it into the “Biography of the righteous (in suffering)”, an ideal type of which he believed he had found in Wisdom of Solomon 2: 12-20. Lührmann’s thesis was reflected in his *Kommentar zum Markusevangelium* [Commentary on the Gospel of Mark] published in 1987 in the renowned *Handbuch zum Neuen Testament* (Handbook on the New Testament) series.

It will probably prove impossible to derive the Gospel genre from a single source. It is far more likely that several different factors had a defining influence.

### 3. One gospel – four Gospels

There is only one gospel that describes the “Christ Event”. The Christ Event—or God’s deed of salvation in Jesus Christ—refers to the fact that

- God sent His Son into the world in order to redeem mankind from sin and death.

But there are four Gospel texts in the New Testament canon. What is the relationship between the gospel and the Gospel texts?

Up until well into the second century, the church speaks of a single gospel, and only thereafter of four Gospels.

Justin was the first to use this plural. The thing that is important to the church here is:

- the four Gospels are not four different messages, but rather four different approaches to the one gospel. The one gospel of the Christ Event is portrayed from four different perspectives. This does not mean, however, that there are four different messages about the activity and suffering and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

We have seen (Chapter 1, 1.2) how the canon came into being **historically** with the four Gospels. Seen from a **theological** viewpoint, the quaternity of the Gospels (in other words, the fact that there are *four* of them) signifies that no single Gospel could exhaustively capture the Christ Event. It is only in the multiplicity of these (sometimes very) different approaches through the four Gospels that the Christ Event becomes more comprehensible. In so doing the canon makes allowance for the fact that there can be contradictions between the Gospels that simply cannot be cleared up.

#### Things to know: the Gospels

The four Gospels are not four different messages, but rather four different approaches to the one gospel.

It is in the multiplicity of differing approaches that the Christ Event becomes easier to comprehend.



### 3.1 Attempts to interpret the fourfold Gospel

Over the years, attempts were made to interpret the connection between the gospel of Jesus Christ and the four Gospel texts.

#### 3.1.1 Symbolic interpretation

**Irenaeus** of Lyon was the presbyter of the church in Lyon between AD 161 and AD 180, before being elected *episcopus* (“bishop”, in this case, city bishop). During this time he wrote a work entitled “*Adversus haereses*” (“Against heresies”) which has only survived in fragmentary form in quotes from the works of Eusebius in the latter’s church history. Irenaeus died in AD 202.

He defended the fourfold Gospel and called them the “Pillars of the Church”. He interpreted the vision of the four living creatures referenced in Revelation 4: 6-7 and originally mentioned in Ezekiel 1: 5-9—which were like a lion, a bull (ox), a man, and an eagle, respectively—in terms of the four Gospels:

He saw:

- [the lion in the Gospel of Mark](#)
- [the bull in the Gospel of Luke](#)
- [the man in the Gospel of Matthew](#)
- [the eagle in the Gospel of John.](#)

Lion	Strength of Christ—He cries out (roars) like a lion in the wilderness (Mark 1: 3)	Mark
Bull (Ox)	Sacrificial animal, priestly character	Luke
Man or angel	Human birth – genealogy at the start – announced by the angel	Matthew
Eagle	The evangelist receives the wings of an eagle and hurries to pursue higher things	John

The Tübingen New Testament scholar **Martin Hengel** (1926-2009) provides a modern interpretation of the four Gospels. Accordingly, the four prominent figures of early Christianity— namely apostles Peter, Paul, John, and James, the brother of the Lord—are reflected in the four Gospels:

- [Peter in the Gospel of Mark \(cf. Papias fragments\)](#)
- [Paul in the Gospel of Luke \(for example, Irenaeus and the Canon Muratori\)](#)
- [John in the Gospel of John \(Irenaeus\)](#)
- [James in the Judeo-Christian character of the Gospel of Matthew.](#)

Martin Hengel did not consider this allocation to be theologically correct, but rather historicallyphilologically correct. And therein lies the crux of this assignment, because it cannot be proven using exegetical means.



### 3.1.2 Gospel harmony according to Tatian

The Syrian Tatian, a disciple of Justin, attempted another approach in Rome in around AD 170. He published a harmonised Gospel text (the *Diatessaron*) in which the four Gospels were woven into one (*dia tessaron evangelion*: “gospel out of four”).

He incorporated the material of the three other Gospels into the framework of the Gospel of John (!). Thereby Tatian also endeavoured to resolve the contradictions within the Gospels, which had created such headaches for the theologians of the early church. The text produced by Tatian was widely distributed and was only suppressed in the fifth century owing to the New Testament canon, with its four Gospels, that had been so well established in the meantime.

Numerous translations attest to the popularity of this work, however, the church decided differently and remained with the four-gospel-canon. It did not desire a harmonisation of the four Gospels. The eldest testimonies of the Jesus-tradition were to remain untouched.

### 3.1.3 Reduction of the four Gospels by Marcion

Marcion, a man with whom we have already become acquainted variously in earlier lessons, went in search of a different solution.

He established a canon of his own in which—out of all four Gospels—he considered only the Gospel according to Luke to be valid. He thus reduced the four Gospels to one. At the same time, Marcion undertook a revision of the Gospel of Luke to adhere to his theology.

The church rejected Marcion’s reduction of the Gospels to a single Gospel. It insisted on the necessity of the four Gospel texts in order to preserve the diversity of the one gospel.

## 4. The gospel and Apostle Paul

Apostle Paul was not familiar with the four Gospels because they had not yet been written during his lifetime. However, he was familiar with the gospel by way of oral traditions. And he also met up at least once with the apostles Peter, James, and John (Galatians 2: 9).

- It is absolutely certain that Apostle Paul adopted this term without any further explanation. He did not coin the term. The term ‘gospel’ (*euangelion*) was already familiar to his readers.
- “The gospel of Christ”, “the gospel of God”, and “my gospel”: Paul uses these terms in reference to verbal preaching (the “*kerygma*”) about God’s saving actions in Jesus Christ.

But with Paul there is only a single gospel, namely the message of Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection.

- When endeavouring to emphasise the *source* of the gospel, Paul uses the term ‘gospel of God’.
- When the emphasis is on content, he uses the term ‘gospel of Christ’.

Apostle Paul was accused of falsifying the one, simple gospel of the suffering and death of Jesus. This reproach must be countered with the fact that, for one thing, the Pauline writings emerged at a much



earlier point in time than the Gospels, and—in addition—that there is objective agreement between Paul and the Gospels with regard to the interpretation of the person of Jesus Christ.

For example, in the profession that Paul proclaims in Corinth, he makes exclusive reference to the Passion and resurrection of Jesus.

- [1 Corinthians 15: 3-5](#)

“For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve.”

## 5. Gospels outside of the Bible

In addition to the canonical Gospels, there are also several extra-canonical Gospels that emerged in early Christendom. These are also known as apocryphal Gospels.

### 5.1 The Gospel of Thomas

The most significant of these—because of its chronological proximity to the canonical Gospels—is the Gospel of Thomas. It is attributed to the Apostle Thomas (Judas) Dydimos, and attests to the living tradition and veneration surrounding this Apostle in Eastern Syria (Edessa?), where it likely came into being in the mid second-century AD.

In the third century AD, the Gospel of Thomas was translated from Greek into Coptic, where it was very popular and in wide use. It was discovered in 1945-46 in Nag Hammadi in Upper Egypt, along with other, mostly Gnostic, writings.

The Gospel of Thomas is mentioned by the church authors Origen, Hippolytus, and Eusebius, and was thus at least known by name.

The Gospel of Thomas is more of a Gnostic revelation text than a Gospel, because it does not contain a Passion narrative or an account of the resurrection—which also explains why it was rejected by the Church Fathers. It contains a total of 114 sayings of Jesus (“*logia*”), but no narratives.

Nevertheless, some very old Jesus-traditions can be found in the Gospel of Thomas from time to time. And there are some parallels to the Synoptic tradition and to Q, for example, Logion 2 of the Gospel of Thomas (cf. Matthew 7: 8):

- “Jesus said: ‘He who seeks, let him not cease seeking until he finds, and when he finds he will be troubled, and when he is troubled he will be amazed, and he will reign over the All.’”

### 5.2 The Gospel of Nicodemus

The Gospel of Nicodemus is purported to have derived from the Jewish scholar Nicodemus, with whom Jesus had a conversation during the night (John 3). However, it originated in the fourth century



AD. In other words, it came into being at a time in which the Gospels belonging to the New Testament were already firmly established.

The Gospel of Nicodemus contains the Acts of Pilate, which were said to have been composed by Nicodemus and claim to describe the trial of Jesus before Pilate.

The Gospel of Nicodemus became extremely influential in historical drama: the figures that emerge in this Gospel, such as Longinus, who stabs Jesus in His side, or Veronica, who hands Him a sweatband, are often portrayed in the drama of the medieval period—even though they do not exist in the New Testament. They are also portrayed in the passion plays that began to flourish in the late Middle Ages.

An expansion on Christ's descent into hell, which is already mentioned in the first Epistle of Peter (1 Peter 3: 19-20)—according to which Christ descended into Hades, the Underworld, between Good Friday and Easter in order to preach the gospel to the souls of the righteous of the Old Testament—had quite an impact on theological history. In the Gospel of Nicodemus, Jesus liberates the righteous from the realm of hell—another frequently depicted motif in medieval art.

### **5.3 Other Apocryphal Gospels**

There are also a number of other apocryphal Gospels, among them:

- the Gospel of Peter, which likely emerged in the second century AD, vividly portrays the Passion and resurrection of Jesus.
- the Gospel of James (also known as the Infancy Gospel of James, or the Protoevangelium of James), which likewise emerged in the second century AD, portrays the legendary background of Mary, which was very popular in church history.
- the pseudo Gospel of Matthew, which emerged around AD 600, depicts the life of Mary and Jesus' childhood in the form of a legend (ox and ass!) and enjoyed tremendous popularity in art history.

While these Gospels were not suppressed by the church, they did not find acceptance into the canon either. After all, many of the events they describe have rather too much of a basis in the world of fantasy.



## 2.3 The Gospel of Mark

*Here we will become acquainted with the structure, content, and basic theological constructs of the Gospel of Mark.*

### 1. Origin of the Gospel captions

The Gospel of Mark is the shortest book among the Synoptic Gospels, and the second book in the canon of the New Testament. Like the other Gospels we know, this Gospel was also handed down anonymously at first. The Gospels do not mention their authors. The Christians of the time were confident that these writings did not need authors, since Jesus Christ was speaking through these Scriptures.

It was only in the second century AD that it became necessary to acknowledge the Gospels as canonical and distinguish them from other texts with Gnostic tendencies. By that point, even the headings above, or beneath, the Gospels had become important in order to distinguish between them. Since that time, they became known as the Gospel according to Mark, the Gospel according to Luke, etc. It was these, now captioned, Gospels that found their way into the canon.

#### 1.1 Who wrote the Gospel of Mark?

It is impossible to determine who exactly authored the Gospel of Mark. In this section we will describe the complexity of the answer to this question. There is no simple or provable answer!

##### 1.1.1 The name Mark

Neither the Gospel of Mark nor the other Gospels name their authors. The second-century legends of the early church seek to identify “Mark” with the Jewish-Christian Mark or John Mark (Acts 12: 12) from Jerusalem:

- [Acts 12: 12](#)  
“So when he had considered this, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying...”

A colleague of Apostle Peter is also described as having the name Mark:

- [1 Peter 5: 13](#)  
“She who is in Babylon, elect together with you, greets you, and so does Mark my son.”

The name “Mark” also appears in connection with Paul, namely as one of the apostle’s co-workers:



- Philemon 23-24  
“Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings. And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers ...”

This Mark was said to have been the interpreter of Apostle Peter, because Peter was not fluent in Greek (according to the testimony of Papias; see 1.1.3). Peter’s listeners were said to have asked Mark to write down the teaching discourses of the apostle.

According to Acts 12: 12, Mark lived in Jerusalem and accompanied Apostle Paul and later Barnabas, to whom he was probably related (Colossians 4: 10). According to a Coptic tradition, Mark was the first Patriarch of Alexandria in Egypt, where he died as a martyr in AD 68. His relics are venerated in San Marco in Venice. However, none of this can be proven.

The name Mark was thus in very broad use at the time.

**For this reason it is uncertain whether the aforementioned persons bearing the name “Mark” are all one and the same person or whether they are several different persons.**

### 1.1.2 Author of the Gospel of Mark

The Gospel of Mark does not mention its author. The caption “Gospel according to Mark” only stems from the second century. To this day, Bible exegesis has been unsuccessful in discovering who the author of the Gospel of Mark really is.

The question of whether the author was a Jewish-Christian or a Gentile-Christian is likewise greatly disputed.

### 1.1.3 Testimony of the Papias fragments

In order to be able to follow this research discussion, let us take a look at the testimony of Papias (or the Papias fragments). Eusebius of Caesarea, the most famous church historian of the fourth century, records the testimony of bishop Papias of Hierapolis in around AD 325. However, he only does so in fragments. In AD 130, Papias refers to traditions that allegedly lead even more deeply into the apostolic period (namely to the presbyter John). However, even Eusebius was already sceptical of the statements made by Papias.

Eusebius writes:

- [“Papias gives also in his own work other accounts of the words of the Lord on the authority of Aristion who was mentioned above, and traditions as handed down by **the presbyter John**; to which we refer those who are fond of learning. But now we must add to the words of his which we have already quoted the tradition which he gives in regard to Mark, the author of the Gospel.”]
- “This also **the presbyter** said: Mark, having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately, though not indeed in order, whatsoever he remembered of the things done or said by Christ. For he neither heard the Lord nor followed him, but afterward, as I said, he followed



Peter, who adapted his teaching to the needs of his hearers, but with no intention of giving a connected account of the Lord's discourses, so that Mark committed no error while he thus wrote some things as he remembered them. For he was careful of one thing, not to omit any of the things which he had heard, and not to state any of them falsely."

## 2. The place where the Gospel of Mark was written

The Gospel is written in simple Greek, namely the language that was spoken everywhere throughout the Roman Empire, especially in the east, but also in the capital city of Rome. When Aramaic or Hebrew words arise, they are translated. Examples include:

- Mark 5: 41  
"Then He took the child by the hand, and said to her, 'Talitha, cumi', which is translated, 'Little girl, I say to you, arise.'"
- Mark 7: 11  
"But you say, 'If a man says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me is Corban" — '(that is, a gift to God)..."
- Mark 7: 34  
"Then, looking up to heaven, He sighed, and said to him, 'Ephphatha,' that is, 'Be opened'..."

Why were these Aramaic or Hebrew words translated into Greek?

- It is assumed that the readers or hearers of the Gospel did not understand any Aramaic. This led to the conclusion that the Gospel of Mark did not come into being in Palestine.

Well then, where else might it have come into being?

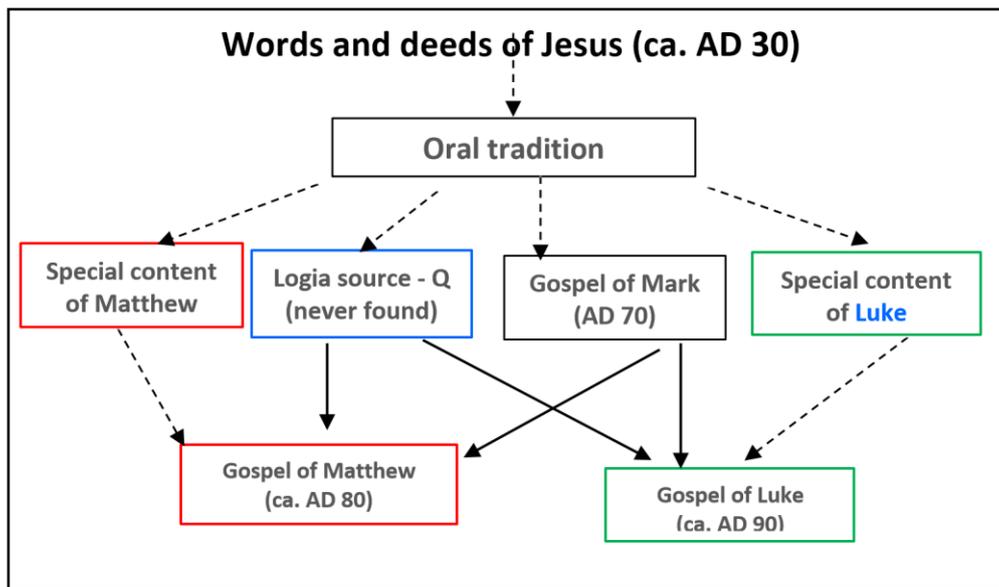
The numerous Latin expressions in the Gospel of Mark are an indication that Latin was spoken in the place where it was written.

- In Mark 12: 42 Mark explains that the two mites (Greek *lepton*, pl. *lepta*) of the widow correspond to a quadrans.
- "Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans." (Some translations use different terms to render the terms *lepta* and *quadrans*).

The *lepton* was a coin used in Judea, and the *quadrans* was the (lowest) Roman coin. It was often used in Italy and Rome. For this reason, it is assumed that the Gospel of Mark came into being in Rome. However, it might also have been in Syria, which was the most productive region for the early Christian tradition. Nevertheless, this cannot be proven conclusively.

## 3. Time of composition

It is generally assumed that the Gospel of Mark came into being between AD 68 and 70.



Why such a relatively specific date?

The explanation for this is found in the Gospel of Mark itself, namely in chapter 13:

- [Mark 13: 14](#)  
“So when you see the ‘abomination of desolation’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.”

Explanation:

It was in the year 66 that the Jewish War—between revolting Jews and their Roman occupiers— began (in Judea). It was feared that the Romans would desecrate the temple in Jerusalem by setting up a statue of the emperor or some other idol there.

The concern over the possible desecration of the temple can practically be read between the lines of the above-cited text from Mark. By around the year AD 68, the war had also reached Jerusalem. In the year AD 70, the war ended with the destruction of Jerusalem, including the temple. From this we deduce that the Gospel according to Mark came into being within a timeframe between AD 68 and AD 70.

#### Things to know: origins of the Gospel of Mark

We do not know exactly who wrote the Gospel according to Mark. The author of the Gospel of Mark cannot be conclusively identified as either a Jewish Christian or a Gentile Christian. The Gospel of Mark was likely composed in Rome.

The Gospel of Mark is presumed to have come into being between AD 68 and AD 70.



#### **4. The structure of the Gospel of Mark**

The Gospel of Mark can basically be structured into four parts:

- Background / prologue (1: 1-15).
- Jesus' authoritative ministry in Galilee (1: 16 – 8: 26)
- Jesus' path to the Passion (8: 27 – 10: 52)
- Jesus in Jerusalem, Passion, and Resurrection (11: 1 – 16: 8)

Most often, the Gospel of Mark is structured in accordance with geographical information, such as Galilee or Jerusalem:

- Background / Prologue
  - Title (1: 1)
  - Preparation of Jesus' Messianic activity by John the Baptist (1: 2-8)
  - Baptism and temptation of Jesus (1: 9-13)
- Jesus' activity in and around Galilee (1: 14 – 8: 26)
  - Preaching, healings, and calling of the first disciples (1: 14-45)
  - Debates (2: 1 – 3: 6)
  - Healings, calling of the Twelve, Jesus' relatives (3: 7-35)
  - Parables (4: 1-34)
  - Miracles on Lake Gennesaret (4: 35 – 5: 43)
  - Conclusion of preaching in Galilee, rejection in Nazareth, sending of the Twelve (6: 1-56)
  - Activity in the lands of the Gentiles and return to Galilee (7: 1 – 8: 26)
- Jesus' path to the Passion (8: 27 – 10: 52)
  - Peter's profession, 1st announcement of sufferings, instructions on following in sufferings (8: 27 – 9: 1)
  - The transfiguration, miracles, 2nd announcement of sufferings, instructions (9: 2-50)
  - Pilgrimage to Jerusalem, 3rd announcement of sufferings, miracles (10: 1-52)
- Jesus in Jerusalem (11: 1 – 16: 8)
  - Jesus' activity in Jerusalem (11: 1 – 13: 37)
    - Entry into the city and cleansing of the temple (11: 1-26)
    - Debates and doctrinal discussions (11: 27 – 12: 44)
    - End time discourses (13: 1-37)
  - Jesus' death and Resurrection (14: 1 – 16: 20)
    - The last day of Jesus with His disciples (14: 1-42)
    - Arrest, trial, and crucifixion of Jesus (14: 43 – 15: 47)
    - The empty tomb (16: 1-8)
    - [Inauthentic close of Mark: appearances of the Risen One, sending of the disciples (16: 9-20)]



## 5. The content of the Gospel of Mark

The “gospel of Jesus Christ” according to Mark begins with the emergence of John the Baptist and associates it with the baptism and temptations of Jesus. Already here it becomes clear to the reader that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God. A central element is the message of the coming of the kingdom of God.

- [Mark 1: 14-15](#)  
“Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.’”

With this the activity of Jesus in Galilee begins. Jesus teaches in parables, Jesus heals the sick, the demon possessed, and performs miracles. All of these things identify Him as the Son of God.

On the start of the way to Jerusalem for the Passion, Jesus reveals Himself to His own as the Son of God. Prior to that, His divine sonship had still been a “secret”: He commands the demon to be silent about His divine sonship—His Messianic dignity was to remain a mystery for the time being. It becomes clear to the readers: this divine sonship will lead to suffering in accordance with God’s plan—and if one follows the Son of God, one might likely end up suffering as well. In addition, the path to Jerusalem is characterised by disputes and debates with opponents.

In Jerusalem, there is a trial for Jesus. He is condemned and crucified. The Gospel ends with the discovery of the empty, open tomb. The current closing of the Gospel (Mark 16: 9-20) was not originally included (see Chapter 1, Section 4, 2.1.2).

## 6. Templates for the Gospel of Mark

It was customary for authors of antiquity to incorporate templates into their texts when composing their works. This was perhaps also the case for the author of the Gospel of Mark.

What sorts of templates might Mark have used in structuring his Gospel?

Here there is a rich and controversial discussion among scholars. After all, in the case of Mark, there is no reference material with which to compare it, as there is in the case of Matthew and Luke (key term: ‘Two Source Hypothesis’). Any inquiry into templates within the Gospel of Mark is thus hypothetical. Nevertheless, it is possible to recognise collections of sayings and deeds of Jesus.

The Gospel of Mark possibly made use of the following templates fixed in writing, which possibly even date back to the time of the early church:

- [a pre-Markan Passion story \(Mark 11-16\)](#)
- [a collection of miracle narratives \(Mark 3-6\)](#)
- [a collection of parables of Jesus \(Mark 4\)](#)
- [a collection of Galilean disputations \(Mark 2,1-3,6\)](#)
- [a catechetical collection for the instruction of the church \(Mark 10\)](#)
- [the end time discourse of Jesus \(Mark 13\)](#)



## 7. The theology of the Gospel of Mark

In this section we will explain the theological content of the Gospel of Mark. Modern exegesis assumes that the four evangelists each developed a theology of their own.

### 7.1 Chronological sequence and geographical order

Already at the start of the nineteenth century it was clear to New Testament scholars that Mark incorporated the Jesus tradition he had found into a chronological and temporal framework, which represents an extraordinary editorial accomplishment on the part of the Gospel of Mark (K. L. Schmidt: *Der Rahmen der Geschichte Jesu* [The framework of the story of Jesus], 1919).

### 7.2 Adoptionism and Divine Sonship

By contrast to the other two major Gospels of Matthew and Luke, and by contrast to the Gospel of John, Jesus Christ is not already the Son of God already before His public activity, or even before His birth. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus is “adopted” as the Son of God through His baptism: “You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Mark 1:11).

The most important theological statement in the Gospel of Mark is: the risen Son of God is none other than Jesus of Nazareth, whose Messiahship was largely concealed during His lifetime. With this theological concept—an outstanding notion in early Christianity—the Gospel of Mark also makes it clear that this path of Jesus is also a call to follow Jesus Christ in His sufferings.

### 7.3 *Theios aner*

Already in the miracle accounts, which may pre-date Mark, Jesus is also presented as the *theios aner*, the Divine Man, or the God-Man. Earlier research had assumed that this “*theios aner*” concept was broadly accepted at the time of Jesus and the early apostles. In that case, the great accomplishment of Mark would have consisted of making use of this notion in a missionary capacity:

The Gentile-Christian readers of the Gospel could identify with that. Jesus would have been recognised as the *theios aner*, which would have been comprehensible to the readers. Today researchers are more careful, since attestations of the *theios aner* concept are more recent than early Christianity, largely dating back to the second and third centuries.

It would be a central achievement of the evangelist to have replaced the Hellenistic idea of the God-Man with the Christian concept of the suffering Son of God. This would have ensured that the divine Sonship of Jesus did not evaporate into some Hellenistic notion of a “superman”.

### 7.4 Messianic secret

William Wrede in 1901 proposed that in Mark there is a motif known today as the “messianic secret”. The Messiahship and divine Sonship of Jesus was concealed during His lifetime. How can Mark now state that this Jesus of Nazareth is the risen Son of God?

Whenever Jesus performs miracles of healing, or drives out demons, the demons always recognise Jesus as the Holy One of God and as the Son of God.



However, Jesus commands them to be silent. His divine sonship is yet to remain concealed. Jesus even commands those whom He heals to remain silent about these events—although they at times fail to heed this order.

Jesus also commands the disciples to be silent, and beyond that, they often fail to understand Him. The mystery surrounding Jesus' divine sonship and Messiahship is ultimately only unveiled through Jesus' death and resurrection ("Truly, this Man was the Son of God").

## 7.5 Call to discipleship

Mark calls his readers into the discipleship of Jesus. For the Gospel of Mark, it is important to follow Jesus, even if Jesus is no longer physically among the Christians.

It makes sense—even under the prevailing conditions in the Roman Empire, where there were already Christian persecutions as early as AD 64—to follow Jesus.

The same message that Mark proclaims to his contemporaries also applies to us:

- it is worthwhile to follow, even though the Lord is no longer physically among us.
- following may, however, incorporate the possibility of suffering.
- in suffering, Jesus is the example we can follow.

## 7.6 The Twelve

The Synoptic Gospels, the Gospel of John, and the book of Acts all attest to the existence of the circle of the Twelve, that is, the circle of twelve select disciples who were later also called apostles.

Mark is the first to relate that Jesus called twelve of His disciples into a closer circle. These disciples He later called apostles. The twelve represented the twelve tribes of the new people of God.

- [Mark 3: 14-19](#)  
"Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons: Simon, to whom He gave the name Peter; James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James, to whom He gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder; Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Canaanite; and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him ..."

When Jesus, according to the Gospel of Mark, calls these twelve as representatives of the new people of God, this is a symbolic act, just like the kind practised by the prophets of the Old Testament.

In His preaching, Jesus made use of mnemonics, a technique of remembering and learning using memory aids. His words were easy for His disciples (both male and female) to remember.

According to Mark 6: 6-13, Jesus sent out the twelve disciples already before His Passion and resurrection, in a first commission. They were to spread Jesus' message about the kingdom of God.



It can be assumed that, in so doing, the disciples not only spread Jesus' words, but rather also told of His actions and works. They likely also acted in His authority, in His name, and cast out spirits and demons, and healed the sick (this might be the source of the oral tradition of Jesus' words and deeds).

### Things to know: the Twelve

List of the apostles according to Mark 3:

- Peter
- James, the son of Zebedee
- John, the brother of James
- Andrew
- Philip
- Bartholomew
- Matthew
- Thomas
- James, the son of Alpheus
- Thaddeus
- Simon the Canaanite
- Judas Iscariot



## 2.4 The Gospel of Matthew

*In this section of chapter 2 we will deal with the structure, content, and basic theological constructs in the Gospel of Matthew. Here we will take a closer look at the background, the Sermon on the Mount, mission, the Old Testament in Matthew, special content, and the logia source in Matthew.*

### 1. The author of the Gospel of Matthew

Like the other three Gospels, the Gospel of Matthew was at first also handed down anonymously. The early Christians assumed that Jesus Christ was speaking in the Gospels. Such a meaningful text required no author, hence the initial anonymity of the Gospel of Matthew as well.

In the second century it became necessary to assess the Gospels as canonical in order to distinguish them from other texts with Gnostic leanings. It was important that an Apostle should stand behind the development of a Gospel. For this reason, captions were set above (at times also beneath) the individual Gospels, in order to distinguish them from one another.

According to the Papias fragment, a manuscript dating to the second century, Matthew was said to have been the author of the Gospel of Matthew. Also according to this fragment, the Gospel was said to have been originally composed in Hebrew.

An excerpt from the Papias-fragment concerning Matthew:

- “So then Matthew wrote the oracles in the Hebrew language, and every one interpreted them as he was able.”

The church teacher Irenaeus of Lyon says something similar about the Gospel of Matthew:

- “Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect.”

It was on the basis of these statements that the Gospel of Matthew was attributed to the Apostle Matthew.

### 1.1 Original language of the Gospel of Matthew

Contrary to the Papias-fragment, the Gospel of Matthew was written in Greek. This insight is based on the fact that the Gospel borrowed from Greek-language sources (for example, the Gospel of Mark, the *Logia* source (Q), etc.).



The writer of the Gospel of Matthew was presumably a Jewish-Christian and likely a Jewish scribe (cf. Matthew 13:52) who converted to Christianity. The multiplicity of Old Testament quotations indicates that the author had considerable knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures. It is probable that he was active in Syria, possibly in Antioch.

It is possible that the Gospel, especially its special content, is based on an older collection of sayings of the Lord, which date back to Apostle Matthew.

### **Things to know: the author of the Gospel of Matthew**

It is impossible to precisely identify the author of the Gospel of Matthew. References from the second century AD (Papias and Irenaeus) do not allow us to conclusively attribute the work to a specific author. Despite this, the view of the early church teachers in church history has become so firmly established that we have referred to this work as the Gospel of Matthew to this very day.

## **2. Position of the Gospel of Matthew in the New Testament canon**

In all the old manuscripts and in the oldest canon registers, the Gospel of Matthew is always listed first. There is no chronological reason for this. Its preferred position as the first Gospel in the canon likely has to do with the fact that the Gospel of Matthew was thought to have been written by an apostle. It was also thought that the teachings of Jesus came to clearest expression in this Gospel.

Since the Gospel of Matthew was always located in first position, it was also popularly regarded as the oldest Gospel (for example, by Augustine). The Gospel of Matthew begins with the sentence:

- [Matthew 1: 1](#)  
“The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham...”

It is also with these words that the whole New Testament begins. This fact is thus another reason why the Gospel of Matthew is listed as the first book in the canon.

After this start to the New Testament, it relates the genealogy of Jesus, which links the Gospel—with Israel, the people of God, and this people’s Holy Scripture, the Old Testament.

The references in Matthew 1: 1 to

- the “Son of David” are a reference to Jesus’ Messianic title,
- the “Son of Abraham” refer to God’s promise to bless Abraham, which is fulfilled in Jesus.

The Gospel of Matthew is the most important Gospel for the early church.



### 3. Time and place of composition of the Gospel of Matthew

#### 3.1 Time of composition of the Gospel of Matthew

It is assumed that the Gospel of Matthew came into being in around AD 80, or at latest AD 90. The Gospel of Matthew makes use of the Gospel of Mark (Two Source Hypothesis) as a foundation. Since the Gospel of Mark came into being in around the year AD 70, the Gospel of Matthew must have been written at a later date.

#### 3.2 Place of composition of the Gospel of Matthew

The place of composition is not precisely known either. It might have been written in Antioch, in Syria or in Damascus. Matthew stresses (in Matthew 4: 24) the activity of Jesus in Syria. The Gospel may have emerged in Syria in around AD 80 (Matthew 4: 24). Evidently, Ignatius of Antioch was familiar with this Gospel. In his letter to the Smyrnaeans, Ignatius quotes extensively from the Gospel, almost verbatim.

- [Matthew 4: 24](#)  
“Then His fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, epileptics, and paralytics; and He healed them ...”

### 4. Target audience of the Gospel

The target group to which this Gospel is directed is quite familiar with Jewish traditions and the Jewish Holy Scripture. In contrast to the Gospel of Mark, the Gospel of Matthew rarely explains any Jewish customs or traditions. The Bible passages quoted from the Old Testament are simply reproduced without any further explanations. It is thus assumed that this information was familiar to the readers.

It is assumed that this group was composed of early Christian wandering preachers, who established Christian congregations in Syria. Like Paul, they may also have linked up with various synagogues. Perhaps the Matthean congregation came into being on the basis of such a synagogue-congregation.

However, the Great Commission at the end of the Gospel shows that Matthew wrote his Gospel for the whole church and not only for a single congregation.

- [Matthew 28: 19](#)  
“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit ...”

Because Matthew directed his Gospel at the whole church, and owing to its apostolic origin, the Gospel of Matthew has become the most important and most popular Gospel of the Bible.



### Things to know: summary of the Gospel of Matthew

Let us remember the following:

- We do not know exactly who wrote the Gospel of Matthew. The early church teachers attribute it to the Apostle Matthew.
- The Gospel was likely composed in Syria.
- It came into being in approximately AD 80.
- It was addressed to both Jewish-Christians and Gentile Christians, and to the church as a whole.

## 5. Structure of the Gospel of Matthew

It is quite conspicuous that the Gospel of Matthew is structured around five major discourses of Jesus.

- [the Sermon on the Mount, chapters 5-7](#)  
The Sermon on the Mount represents the doctrine of Jesus and the new covenant.
- [Missionary instructions, chapter 10](#)  
Jesus provides instructions for missionary work of the disciples and announces persecutions.
- [Parable discourse, chapter 13](#)  
The parable discourse consists of seven parables of Jesus and two interpretations.
- [Church discourse, chapters 18](#)  
This discourse provides instructions for church life and discipline.
- [End time \(eschatological\) discourse, chapters 24-25](#)  
The end time discourse describes the events at the end of time and admonishes vigilance.

## 6. Content of the Gospel of Matthew

In his Gospel, Matthew does not merely give five different discourses, but also relates Jesus life from His birth to His resurrection.

- [Birth and childhood account \(1: 1 – 2: 23\)](#)
- [John the Baptist, baptism and temptations of Jesus \(3: 1 – 4: 11\)](#)
- [Beginning of the public activity of Jesus and the calling of the disciples \(4: 12-25\)](#)
- [First discourse: The Sermon on the Mount \(5: 1 – 7: 29\)](#)
- [Miracles and preaching of Jesus \(8:1 – 9: 34\)](#)
- [Second discourse: missionary instructions \(9: 35 – 10: 42\)](#)
- [Various healings and disputations \(11: 1 – 12: 50\)](#)
- [Third discourse: parables \(13: 1-52\)](#)
- [Activity in Galilee \(13: 53 – 17: 27\)](#)
- [Fourth discourse: church life \(18: 1-35\)](#)
- [Jesus' path to Jerusalem \(19: 1 – 20: 34\)](#)
- [Jesus' public activity in Jerusalem \(21: 1 – 23: 39\)](#)



- Fifth discourse: end time (eschatological) discourse (24: 1 – 25: 46)
- [Death and resurrection \(26: 1 – 28: 15\)](#)
- [The appearing of the Risen One and the Great Commission to the disciples \(28: 16-20\)](#)

## 7. Sources of the Gospel of Matthew

In accordance with the Two Source Hypothesis, the two main sources for the Gospel of Matthew are the Gospel of Mark and the *Logia* source. The Gospel of Matthew follows the Gospel of Mark very closely.

However, the Gospel of Matthew also has some special content (for example, the childhood account) that is not present in the Gospel of Mark.

The second source is the *Logia* source, Q, which Matthew incorporates into the structure of the Gospel of Mark, mostly in blocks, especially in the discourses.

There are various theories on the other sources. Whether there are any other sources, and what these might be, cannot be conclusively determined.

## 8. The theology of the Gospel of Matthew

### 8.1 Christology

The theology of the Gospel of Matthew focuses on Christology, which means statements about the person and nature of Jesus Christ. The following Bible passages demonstrate this clearly: Jesus is described as the Son of Abraham and the Son of David:

- [Matthew 1: 1](#)  
“The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the **Son of Abraham.**”

Jesus is described as “Immanuel”, which means “God with us”:

- [Matthew 1: 23](#)  
“Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which is translated ‘**God with us.**’”

The Risen Jesus always remains with His own, to the end of the world/age:

- [Matthew 28: 16-20](#)
- “Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them. When they saw Him, they worshipped Him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, **I am with you always, even to the end of the age.**’”



All righteousness is fulfilled in Him (Jesus):

- Matthew 3: 15  
“But Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to **fulfil all righteousness**. Then he allowed Him.”

He will save His people from sin:

- Matthew 1: 21  
“And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, **for He will save His people from their sins ...**”

The designation of Jesus as the Son of God is of central importance to Matthew:

- Matthew 16: 16  
“Simon Peter answered and said, ‘You are the Christ, **the Son of the living God.**’

## 8.2 Fulfilment citations or quotations

Throughout Jesus’ time on earth, in His life, activity, and death, the promises of the old covenant come to pass. Matthew makes use of **fulfilment citations** to this end. He takes a promise from the Old Testament, and demonstrates that it has **now been fulfilled in Jesus Christ**.

Fulfilment citations often arise in the account of the Lord’s childhood, in order to make it clear that this newly born child was already promised in the Old Testament.

- Matthew 1: 22  
“So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying ... (Isaiah 7: 14) ...”

Two fulfilment citations interpret fundamental characteristics of the activity of Jesus as the fulfilment of promises:

- Matthew 8: 17  
“...that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying (Isaiah 53: 4): ‘He Himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses’”
- Matthew 13: 35  
“... that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying (Psalm 78: 2): ‘I will open My mouth in parables; I will utter things kept secret from the foundation of the world.’”

The words that these fulfilment citations quote from the Old Testament are taken from the Septuagint, and quite possibly represent an independent source for the Gospel of Matthew. By way of the fulfilment citations, and the genealogy of Jesus all the way back to David and Abraham, the Gospel of Matthew emphasises that this Jesus is the Messiah awaited by Israel, which Israel rejects, however.



### 8.3 Jesus the Teacher (new Moses)

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus also emerges as a Teacher of the church. He is the second Moses, the new lawgiver. Jesus cites from the Law of Moses and supersedes this Law with His own commandment:

- [Matthew 5: 21-22](#)  
“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’ But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgement. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire.”

As we saw above with the structure of the Gospel, Matthew 5 records sayings of Jesus. The question might arise as to whether these five discourses are intended to replace the five books of Moses. This cannot be conclusively proven, however.

### 8.4 The church as the true Israel

There are two passages in the Gospel of Matthew where Jesus uses the term *ekklesia* (assembly/church). This is not found anywhere else in the Gospels.

- [Matthew 18: 17](#)  
“And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the **church**. But if he refuses even to hear the **church**, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.”
- [Matthew 16: 18](#)  
“And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My **church**, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”

Matthew’s congregation is evidently comprised of a mixture of Jewish-Christians and Gentile Christians. The church is thus in a state of transition. It is replacing the old people of God, namely the nation of Israel.

Following the destruction of Jerusalem in the year AD 70, the Sadducees and other religious groups gradually disappeared. The only groups to survive this catastrophe were the Pharisees and scribes. It was from these groups that the movement of the Rabbis began in around AD 90/100. This church stood in firm opposition to the newly reinforced Pharisaic movement.

On the one hand the congregation of Matthew still respects Jewish laws, but on the other hand, the Gospel sharply criticises the scribes and Pharisees and their interpretation of the Law. The religious leaders of Israel had already rejected Jesus as the Messiah—in fact, they had even crucified Him.

They had declined the invitation to the marriage feast:

- [Matthew 22: 7-10](#)  
“But when the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you



find, invite to the wedding.’ So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests.”

The fruits that Israel was to bring originally would now be brought about by another form of leadership, namely the leaders of the church, the apostles.

- **Matthew 21: 40-41**  
“Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?’ They said to Him, He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons.”

This passage tells us that Jesus Christ is seeking a new leadership for the new covenant people of God.