

The Harmony of the Gospels

Part 1 – Introduction

The harmony of the gospel is a union of the four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, which all focus on the life of Jesus. This harmony combines the four gospels in one account of Jesus' life on earth in a chronological manner.

As a stand-alone, the gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John emphasize Christ's unique life, but when they are blended together, they emphasize Christ's life in a broader context and also provide supporting evidence of the accounts of Jesus' life on earth.

The four gospels are beautifully woven together and presented in one seamless running narrative, streamlined in a chronological order.

What are gospels:

The English term gospel comes from the Old English 'godspell', a translation of the Greek noun *euangelion*, meaning "good tidings" or "good news."

Euangelion was used in the Greek world for the announcement of good news, such as victory in battle, or for the enthronement of a Roman ruler. An inscription for the birthday of the Roman emperor Augustus reads, "Good news [euangelia] to the world!"

The term was eventually expanded to include any work which dealt with —the birth, ministry, suffering, death, and resurrection of the Messiah. The Gospels cannot be understood as simple records of events, not biographies. They are theological documents written to instruct and encourage believers and to convince unbelievers of the truth of their message. This is evident in that they focus especially on the saving work accomplished through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is why we call the Gospel writers Evangelists (from euangelizom, "to announce good news"). They are proclaimers of the good news about Jesus Christ and the coming of the kingdom of God.

Each of the authors carefully selected and shaped his material with both his own understanding of Jesus Christ and the needs of the community to which he was writing.

This was all done under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. That is the primary reason we can be certain that it is harmonious and consistent.

Four gospels in the New Testament are – Mathew, Mark, Luke & John

Synoptic gospels:

The gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are referred to as the synoptic Gospels because they include many of the same stories, often in a similar sequence and in similar or sometimes identical wording. They stand in contrast to John, whose content is largely distinct.

Synopsis – Syn – together/ ophis – sight appearance, to see (latin synopsis , modern latin – synopticus ; Greek synopsis – a general view, a comprehensive view literally seeing altogether , a seeing all at once) . Giving an account of events from the same point of view.

The Synoptic Gospels — Matthew, Mark, and Luke — have many stories in common and share similar language. Each of the four Gospels was written to provide a unique perspective on the person and work of Jesus Christ. The Gospel of John is written in a different style and provides unique material and a more theological presentation.

Why four gospels? If they are all talking about one person. Isn't one enough?

- Example : Suppose four people were asked to take a portrait of a person from 4 different sides. You would get 4 different portraits of that single person.
- Example: News report /4 witnesses of an accident – Each news paper / channel will describe differently (difference in language, vocabulary, narration, notice some things, omit some details. They are all describing about the same incident)

They are all writing about the same person but writing from different angles. The four Gospels were written to provide four unique portraits of Jesus Christ. This was God's design to present Jesus in different ways. This is for our benefit that we might understand Jesus' fulfillment of prophecies, His great love for us, His humble submission to His Father's will and both His humanity and divinity.

How should you approach apparent contradictions?

In other words, you will encounter what might appear to be discrepancies or contradictions between the Gospels. How should you approach apparent contradictions? The following four starting points will help readers of the Gospels approach apparent contradictions in a helpful way.

1. Presuppose That the Gospels Do Not Contradict Each Other

Are we approaching the Bible as a skeptic or as a humble worshiper? Heart's posture is important. Attitude of trembling before His word. "This is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word" (Isa 66:2b).

The Gospels are God's words, so we should presuppose that they do not contradict each other.

The Gospels Are God-breathed Scriptures: This reason is based on the character of God and the nature of Scripture.

The Character of God. God is entirely truthful—without error (inerrant) and incapable of error (infallible). God does not and cannot lie (Num 23:19; 1Sam 15:29; 2Sam 7:28; John 3:33; 14:6; Rom 3:4; Titus 1:2; Heb 6:18; 1Jn 5:6).

Nature of scriptures:

2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.

2 Peter 1:21 For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

God the Holy Spirit carried along the Bible's authors to write God-breathed Scripture. The proper way to respond to God's words is to trust that what the all-knowing, all-good God has spoken is completely true.

2. The Gospels are historically reliable. They date early—in the first century. And their manuscript evidence is far better than for any other ancient literature outside the Bible. They feature credible eye-witness testimony. They are strikingly consistent with the historical-cultural context of first-century Judea (ex: details about geography and customs). They do not falsely report facts.
3. The Gospels were never meant to be videotapes of events or word-for-word transcripts. It is the normal method of history writing—both ancient and modern—to summarize accounts, paraphrase speeches, omit extraneous details, and report events from a particular vantage point.

Reason 1: The Gospels Paraphrase and Interpret Events and Sayings

Jesus probably spoke in Aramaic most of the time, and the Gospels are in Greek. That means the Gospels translate and thus interpret to some degree.

For example, compare “Blessed are you who are poor” (Luke 6:20) with “Blessed are the poor in spirit” (Matt 5:3). Jesus may have spoken exactly those words on different occasions, or Matthew may be clarifying what Jesus intended.

Reason 2: The Gospels Abbreviate and Omit Events and Sayings

The authors of the Gospels select what events and sayings to include and exclude. Sometimes one Gospel mentions two individuals (Matt 8:28; 20:30; Luke 24:4), and another mentions one (Mark 5:2; 10:46; 16:5). But in such cases, the author who identifies one person does not specify that there was only one. The author may simply be highlighting the primary figure and omitting the other.

Reason 3: The authors of the Gospels do not always present events and sayings in strictly chronological order. They may arrange them topically or theologically.

For example, when Satan tempts Jesus three times in the wilderness, temptations two and three are in reverse order in Matthew 4:1–11 and Luke 4:1–13. The chronological order is unclear. In Luke’s third temptation, Jesus is “on the pinnacle of the temple” (Luke’s Gospel emphasizes Jerusalem and the temple). In Matthew’s third temptation, Jesus is on “a very high mountain” (Matthew’s Gospel pictures mountains as places where one receives revelation). But an event is still historical if the author reorders it. You cannot dismiss any scripture.

4. Best way to read is to read vertically (following the plot of each narrative from beginning to end) & horizontally (comparing their accounts with one another — enables the reader to see more clearly each Gospel’s particular themes and theology)

Reading horizontally / Synopsis of gospels - places the Gospels in parallel columns. By comparing the Gospels, we can identify each writer’s themes and theology; discern each evangelist’s unique theological perspective.

The Gospels present four accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus. Merging them as a single, harmonized “life of Christ” prevents distorting the integrity of each story and the Spirit inspired message.

Chronological order of Gospels written: The Gospel of Mark (written first) probably dates from c. AD 66–70, Matthew and Luke around AD 85–90, and John AD 90–110.

Gospels are a representation of:

- **The tabernacle colours** – The colours purple, scarlett, white, blue were all interwoven into the gate of tabernacle, priestly garments, veil separating the Holy and most Holy place. (Woven tapestry)

Exodus 26:31 “You shall make a veil woven of blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and fine woven linen. It shall be woven with an artistic design of cherubim.”

- Purple (Royalty of Christ in Mathew)
- Red (suffering servant in Mark)
- White (Son of man, perfect man in Luke)
- Blue (Son of God from heaven in John)



- **The faces of cherubim** – Ezekiel saw the vision, in Revelation, these cherubims were on the veil of the tabernacle. (This was studied and accepted by the 2nd century church fathers)

Ezekiel 1: 10- 11 NIV Their faces looked like this: Each of the four had the face of a human being, and on the right side each had the face of a lion, and on the left the face of an ox; each also had the face of an eagle. 11 Such were their faces. They each had

two wings spreading out upward, each wing touching that of the creature on either side; and each had two other wings covering its body.

Revelation 4: 6-8 NIV Also in front of the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal. In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. 7 The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. 8 Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under its wings. Day and night they never stop saying: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, ‘who was, and is, and is to come.’”

Mathew – Lion (Jesus is portrayed as “King of Kings” in Matthew’s gospel. The Lion corresponds to it because the Lion is the King of beasts as Jesus is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.)

Mark – Ox (Mark portrays Jesus as the humble servant, a suffering servant doing the will of the Father, surrendering Himself completely. The ox was used as a sacrificial animal as well as a beast of burden; a servant.)



Luke – Man’s face (Luke portrays Jesus as Son of Man, Son of David, perfect man. Face of man represents Jesus’ incarnation in human form) As the man, the Lord Jesus is a lover, a friend, a companion, an associate, and a leader.

John – Eagle (John presents Jesus as the Son of God, second person of the Trinity, co equal and co eternal with the Father & Spirit. He reveals the divinity of Jesus. Eagle represents a bird that soars on high, above the earth,

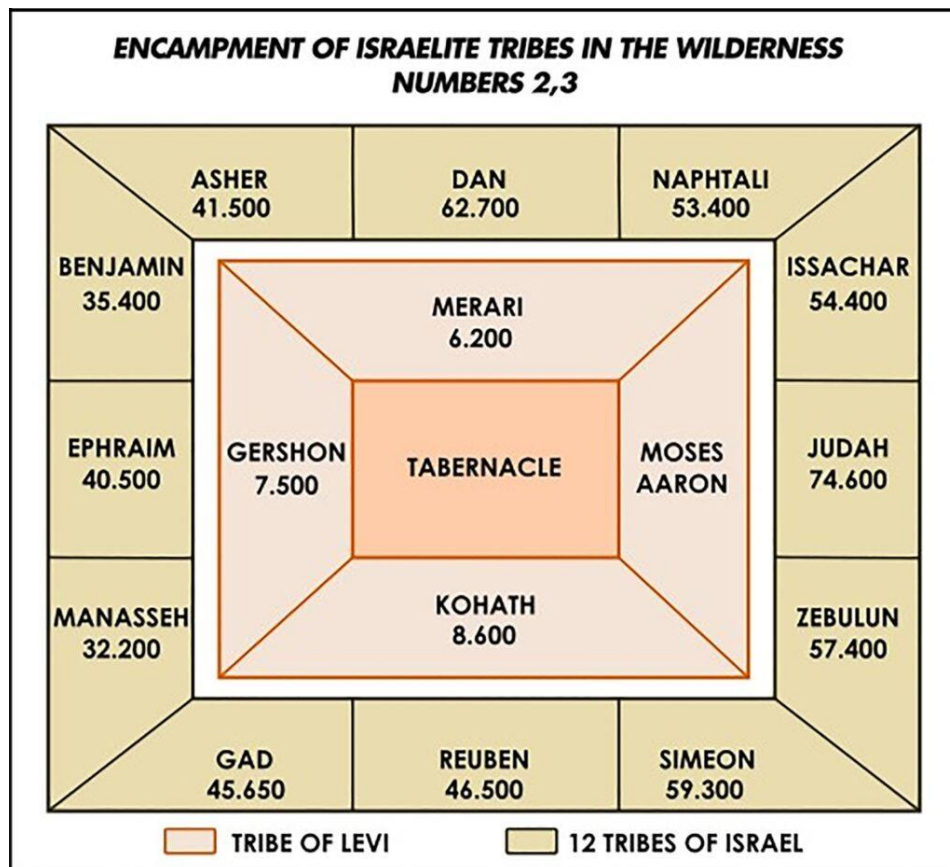
- **The four primary banners/flags of Israel’s encampment arrangement, around the tabernacle:**

Judah (east side) – lion

Ephraim (west side) – ox

Dan (North) – Eagle

Reuben – the man



Gospel of Mathew:

- **All about the author/ background:**
Mathew (Levi)- a Jew, one of the 12 disciples of Jesus / apostles
- **Profession** – Tax collector (left his job when Jesus called him to be His disciple. He even celebrated his calling by hosting a dinner at his house)
Mathew 9: 9-11 As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him. 10 Later, Matthew invited Jesus and his disciples to his home as dinner guests, along with many tax collectors and other disreputable sinners. 11 But when the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with such scum / sinners?" 12 On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. 13 But go and learn what this

means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

- **Who is he writing to & purpose:** Jewish Christian congregation (to present Jesus to the Jewish people)
That's why Mathew uses a lot of Old Testament quotation/ scriptures as the Jews needed scriptural references / backup.
- **Theme presented:** Mathew presents Jesus as the promised Messiah & the coming King.
Represented by Lion, purple color – symbolising royalty. Royalty needs a genealogy, a lineage. That is why he brings in the genealogy from Abraham; lineage from King David (royal descent) - signifying the fulfillment of promise; the seed that has been preserved even when many tried to destroy it. Connected the genealogy to the plan of God from the beginning. It was important to prove that to the Jewish community.
The genealogy is traced back to David the King, and the place of his birth is told, Bethlehem the city of David.

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. Isaiah 11: 1

But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days. Micah 5:2

(After narrating an event in Jesus' life/ a statement, Mathew often connects it to the prophetic quotations by prophet Isaiah, Daniel, Isaiah, Zechariah – to show the prophetic fulfillment) *"This was to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet"*

Jesus was not appointed or made as a king but was born as a king.

- **Notes:** Even though a true eyewitness to Jesus' ministry, scholars say Mathew based his writing on Mark's narrative. We need to know Mark's gospel represents the preaching of the apostle Peter.

Kingdom of heaven is used more than Kingdom of God (used interchangeably). This is because of the expectation of Jewish people who were waiting for the Kingdom to be established.

The writing approach is like a teacher. He gives a lot of importance to the teachings of Jesus.

Matthew ends with our LORD'S RESURRECTION

Gospel of Mark:

- **All about the author/ background:** Mark (John Mark) is the author of the gospel bearing his name. This book represents the preaching of the apostle Peter.

Mark traveled with the Apostle Paul during his first missionary journey. He then accompanied the Apostle Peter to Rome and stayed by him while he was in prison. He was the disciple of Peter.

Profession: Mark is known as Peter's interpreter, both in speech and in writing. The family of John Mark was apparently of some importance to the early Church in Jerusalem since Peter, after his miraculous escape from jail, went to the house of Mark's mother, where he knew that many Christians would be gathered to pray (Acts 12:12). This house was a center for Christian gathering.

It was in his parent's home that the Last Supper was held.

Mark is one of the two main sources of Matthew and Luke. Mark's Gospel was widely circulated among first-century churches.

- **Who is he writing to & purpose:** To the Romans
- **Theme presented:** Humble servant, a lowly servant fulfilling the mission (***Mark 10:45 The son of man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom to many***)
Represented by ox / scarlett – suffering servant
The Gospel of Mark invites the Christian to embrace humble service as exemplified in Jesus Christ.
- **Notes:** No genealogy found in this gospel as the genealogy of a servant is unimportant.

Starts with Jesus's ministry.

Usage of the words 'Forthwith, immediately, presently, straightway, soon' seen throughout as the servant's attitude is to obey immediately. ***Luke 4:39 And he***

stood over her, and rebuked the fever; and it left her: and immediately she arose and ministered unto them.”

Luke 18:43 “And immediately he received his sight, and followed him, glorifying God: and all the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God.

Mark ends with our LORD'S ASCENSION .

Gospel of Luke:

- **All about the author / background:** Luke is the author, most probably a Greek /a gentile. Wrote Book of Acts also.
Luke partnered with Paul and accompanied him at the tail end of his third missionary journey, joining him in Troas (Acts 20:5). Travelled with Paul . Disciple of Paul.
- **Profession** – Physician , a believer
- **Who is he writing to & purpose:** To the Greeks / Hellenists (Greek speaking Jews) **Also to the Most excellent Theophilus (Luke 1:3)** . His title suggests he was a Roman official.
- **Theme presented** – Son of man who came to seek & save that which was lost.
Represented by face of man / white colour
- Notes :
Luke’s genealogy is from Adam (humanity connection) .

As a physician, Luke has a meticulous process of documenting historical detail. This Gospel was an investigated account, in which Luke carefully and accurately researched the testimony of witnesses. *Luke 1:3 **Many people have set out to write accounts about the events that have been fulfilled among us. 2 They used the eyewitness reports circulating among us from the early disciples. 3 Having carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I also have decided to write an accurate account for you, most honorable Theophilus, 4 so you can be certain of the truth of everything you were taught. Luke 1:3-4 NLT***

The expression that is translated as exact truth is a form of the Greek word: ἀσφάλεια (G803 – pronounced: “as-fal’-i-ah”). It means to be firm or to have certainty or be sure of truth.

This means that in addition to relying on existing Gospel accounts (i.e. Matthew and Mark), Luke conducted his own research. He verified, investigated everything carefully from the beginning.

As a historian, wanted things in order. The Greek philosophy is all about order. Matthew, Mark, and John roughly retell the events of Jesus's life in chronological order, but they rearrange the sequence to draw out specific themes and associate ideas and events from Jesus's life accordingly. Only Luke claims to tell his Gospel in chronological consecutive order from the beginning.

Service of Christ to the lost ones is primarily found here. 3 parables of lost coin, lost sheep and lost son, story of the Good Samaritan, cost of discipleship is found only in Luke. ***Luke 22:26-27 NLT But among you it will be different. Those who are the greatest among you should take the lowest rank, and the leader should be like a servant. 27 Who is more important, the one who sits at the table or the one who serves? The one who sits at the table, of course. But not here! For I am among you as one who serves.***

Luke ends with our LORD'S PROMISE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

Gospel of John :

- **All about the author / background : Written by Jesus' beloved disciple John/ Apostle John . Direct eyewitness . Also wrote 1st, 2nd & 3rd John, Revelation.**

Profession: Fisherman (He left his job and followed Jesus when he was called)

John and his brother James, accompanied by their father Zebedee, were preparing their nets in a boat when Jesus called them. Both James and John left the boat and their father to follow Jesus (Matt 4:18-22). Jesus often took Peter, James, and John aside defining them as an inner circle of disciples (13:23-24; 20:2-10; 21:2, 7, 20ff.). Not only is John counted among this select group, but he also refers to himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved (13:23; 20:2; 21:7, 20).

- **Written to & purpose :** John is written to all men (mixture of Greek & Romans) , that they might believe that Jesus is the Christ.

John 20:30-31 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

'Signs' is the key word used in John. He uses the word semeion, or "sign," (17 times) because these works performed by Jesus are not just super-natural miracles but are signs that unveil the glory and power of God working through Jesus the Messiah. (wine at the wedding at Cana, the multiplication of the loaves to feed the 5,000, the raising of Lazarus from the dead)

Since these "signs" or miracles are concentrated in chapters 1-12 many scholars call the first half of John's Gospel the "Book of Signs."

Seven 'I am' statements of Christ.

- **Theme : Christ is portrayed as the Son of God. This Gospel is filled with extraordinary claims that attest His divine character and mission.**

Represented by Eagle , blue colour (heavenly)

- **Notes :**

Gospel of John, like Matthew, Mark, and Luke, teaches about Jesus' earthly life. But this Gospel is uniquely different from the others. Unlike the other Gospels, John doesn't tell us about Jesus' birth, His baptism, His ascension. The Lord's Supper is omitted. Perhaps most striking, there are no parables.

The emphasis on the deity of Christ is a striking quality of John's gospel.

No genealogy but starts with the preincarnate existence of Christ . John 1:1 In the beginning was the word, the word was with God and the word was God. (even ahead of other genealogies)

John uses a lot of 'come and see' phrases. ***John 11:34 And said, Where have ye laid him? They said unto him, Lord, come and see.***

John 1: 46 And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see.

John 4:29 Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?

When John was alone in Isle of Patmos, the Lord decided to show him the greatest revelation of things to come. "Come up and I will show you things to come". He had the greatest vision of heavenly things in the book of Revelation, more than anyone else.

John ends with our LORD'S PROMISE OF HIS SECOND COMING.

