

THE LIFE OF CHRIST, 1

DAVID L. ROPER



THROUGH THE
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Course: The Life of Christ, 1

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ABBREVIATIONS

OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis	Gen.	Ecclesiastes	Eccles.
Exodus	Ex.	Song of Solomon	Song
Leviticus	Lev.	Isaiah	Is.
Numbers	Num.	Jeremiah	Jer.
Deuteronomy	Deut.	Lamentations	Lam.
Joshua	Josh.	Ezekiel	Ezek.
Judges	Judg.	Daniel	Dan.
Ruth	Ruth	Hosea	Hos.
1 Samuel	1 Sam.	Joel	Joel
2 Samuel	2 Sam.	Amos	Amos
1 Kings	1 Kings	Obadiah	Obad.
2 Kings	2 Kings	Jonah	Jon.
1 Chronicles	1 Chron.	Micah	Mic.
2 Chronicles	2 Chron.	Nahum	Nahum
Ezra	Ezra	Habakkuk	Hab.
Nehemiah	Neh.	Zephaniah	Zeph.
Esther	Esther	Haggai	Hag.
Job	Job	Zechariah	Zech.
Psalms	Ps.	Malachi	Mal.
Proverbs	Prov.		

NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew	Mt.	1 Timothy	1 Tim.
Mark	Mk.	2 Timothy	2 Tim.
Luke	Lk.	Titus	Tit.
John	Jn.	Philemon	Philem.
Acts	Acts	Hebrews	Heb.
Romans	Rom.	James	Jas.
1 Corinthians	1 Cor.	1 Peter	1 Pet.
2 Corinthians	2 Cor.	2 Peter	2 Pet.
Galatians	Gal.	1 John	1 Jn.
Ephesians	Eph.	2 John	2 Jn.
Philippians	Phil.	3 John	3 Jn.
Colossians	Col.	Jude	Jude
1 Thessalonians	1 Thess.	Revelation	Rev.
2 Thessalonians	2 Thess.		

AB	Amplified Bible
ASV	American Standard Version
KJV	King James Version
LB	Living Bible
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NCV	New Century Version
NIV	New International Version
NLT	New Living Translation
RSV	Revised Standard Version

INTRODUCTION

THE FOUR GOSPEL ACCOUNTS

We are beginning a study of the life of Jesus Christ as told in the first four books of the New Testament, each of which is named after its author:

Matthew—a former tax collector and an apostle of Jesus.

Mark—the John Mark of the Book of Acts, a young preacher of the apostolic age.

Luke—Dr. Luke, who accompanied Paul on several of his missionary journeys, including the trip to Rome.

John—a former fisherman and the “beloved” apostle.

This study, as a kind of harmony of the Gospels, brings together the four accounts of His life into one story. Later, thorough commentaries will be issued on the Books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John individually.

Four Accounts of One Story

The Books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are often called “the four Gospels,” but actually they are *four accounts* of the one gospel. The term “Gospels” has been used to refer to the first four books of the New Testament since the second or third century.

The first three books are generally called “the synoptic

Gospels." "Synoptic" combines a Greek word for "together" with a word meaning "to see or view." "Synoptic" thus means "to view together." The first three books are designated "the synoptic Gospels" because they present similar views of Jesus. All of them were probably written before the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

The Book of John is sometimes called "the autoptic [self-view] Gospel" because it takes a somewhat different approach than the other three. The word "autoptic" can also convey the idea of an eyewitness. John's account was probably written later than the first three, in the A.D. 90s.

Why Four Accounts?

Why did God give us four books that cover the same period of time and the same story? In the Scriptures, other periods of time are covered by more than one book (many events in 1 Sam. through 2 Kings are also reported in 1 and 2 Chron.), but to have four accounts of the same story is unusual.

In the early history of the church, men speculated as to why there were four accounts. One guess was that "four is the [symbolic] number of man." We do not know why God decided on this specific number, but the fact that He inspired multiple accounts indicates several truths:

1. Four accounts show *how important* the story of Jesus is.
2. Four accounts impress the need to *authenticate* the story of Jesus. Moses said that "on the evidence of *two or three* witnesses a matter shall be confirmed" (Deut. 19:15b; emphasis added). *Four* witnesses is even better.
3. Four accounts reveal *the multifaceted nature* of Jesus. One writer could probably never do Him justice.

In the National Gallery in London there are three representations on a single canvas of Charles I. In one his head is turned to the right; in another, to the left; and in the center we find the full-face view. This is the story of this production. Van Dyck painted them for Bernini, the Roman sculptor, that he might by their help make a bust of the king. By combining the impressions so received,

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Bernini would be better able to produce a “speaking” likeness. One view would not have been enough.

It may be true that the Gospels were intended to serve the very purpose of these portraits. Each presents a different aspect of our Lord’s life on earth. Together we have the complete picture. He was a King, but He was the Perfect Servant, too. He was the Son of Man, but we must not forget He was the Son of God.¹

Comparing the Four Accounts

All of the four accounts have the same basic purpose—to reveal Jesus—but each was written from a slightly different point of view, apparently appealing to a somewhat different audience. For an example of tailoring an account for different audiences, see the three accounts of the conversion of Paul in the Book of Acts: In Acts 9 the account was written for Luke’s readers; in Acts 22 it was part of Paul’s defense before Jews in Jerusalem; in Acts 26 it was part of Paul’s sermon in Caesarea which was primarily directed to King Agrippa. Simon Kistemaker made this comment on the last two of these accounts: “From that same incident [his conversion], [Paul] wisely chose different words and emphasized different aspects in his effort to bring the gospel to each party. . . .”²

Regarding the four Gospel Accounts, Matthew was apparently writing primarily for the *Jews*. He quoted over one hundred Old Testament passages and used terms familiar to the Jews, such as “son of David” (Mt. 1:1). He presented Jesus as a King who came to set up His kingdom; the word “kingdom” appears fifty-five times in the book. He put special emphasis on Jesus as the Messiah and wrote of His teachings, His kingdom, and His authority.

Unlike Matthew, Mark seems to have written for a non-Jewish audience. He eliminated matters of little interest to Gentiles, such

¹Henrietta C. Mears, *What the Bible Is All About* (Glendale, Calif.: Gospel Light Publications, 1966), 348.

²Simon Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1990), 899.

as genealogies. When He mentioned Jewish tradition, He usually added an explanation. Many writers think that Mark was addressing a *Roman* audience; he sometimes used Latin phrases in stories where the other writers used Greek phrases. According to Clement of Alexandria (c. A.D. 150–215), Mark received a request from Christians at Rome to record the life of Christ as he had heard it from Peter.³ Mark seems to have been more concerned with what Jesus *did* than with what He *taught*. He presented Jesus as a Servant, One who helped others (Mk. 10:45). He emphasized the miracles of Jesus because, in them, the Lord's love and care for people can be seen.

Like Mark, Luke apparently wrote for a non-Jewish audience. However, while Mark's account seems directed to the action-oriented Roman, Luke's account appears to have been written for the intellectual, the student. Many conclude that Luke had a *Greek* audience in mind. His account presents Jesus as "the Son of Man" (Lk. 19:10) and puts special emphasis on His perfect humanity.

John's account, which was probably written near the end of the first century, has its own special emphasis. Erroneous concepts had arisen regarding the nature of Jesus, causing confusion among *believers*. John presented Jesus as "the Son of God" (Jn. 20:31) and stressed His deity.

We could say that Matthew has special appeal today for the Bible student and Mark has special appeal for the average person, including businessmen, while Luke appeals especially to scholars, thinkers, idealists, and truth-seekers. On the other hand, John has been called "the universal Gospel," appealing to all people for all time.

Further, we could say that Matthew's purpose is to present Jesus as the *promised* Savior; Mark, the *powerful* Savior; Luke, the *perfect* Savior; and John, the *personal* Savior. As we make these distinctions, however, we must not lose sight of the fact that the ultimate purpose of each book is the same: *to bring all men to a saving knowledge of Jesus!*

³Clement *Fragments* 4.