

INTRODUCTION TO THE GOSPELS

The first four books in the New Testament are the Gospels. These books record the birth, life, ministry, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The approach of each book differs:

Matthew: Emphasizes Jesus Christ as King and was directed especially to the Jews. The book opens with the royal genealogy and closes with the King commissioning His disciples. The book was written by Matthew, a disciple of Jesus and former tax collector.

Mark: Emphasizes Jesus Christ as the Servant of God and was directed to the Romans. No genealogy is given since Jesus is portrayed as a servant. The book closes with the Lord "working with them," laboring as a servant with His disciples. The book was written by Mark.

Luke: Presents Jesus Christ as the Son of Man, the perfect man and Savior of imperfect men. The book was directed to the Greeks. Luke traces the human genealogy of Jesus back to Adam, and ends with Jesus ascending back up to Heaven to His Father. The book was written by Luke, who was a Gentile doctor.

John: Emphasizes Jesus in His position as the Son of God. The book opens with Jesus the Word revealed as God. The closing verse of John indicates that the world could not contain all Jesus did during His earthly ministry. This is further evidence that He was truly the Son of God. The book was written by John, a disciple of Jesus who was formerly a fisherman. John also wrote three epistles that bear his name, plus the book of Revelation.

SECTS AND GROUPS IN THE GOSPELS

This list provides basic definitions of various sects and groups mentioned in the Gospels.

Elders: The Jewish elders were not only of advanced age, but were men of distinct social and religious stature who served as representatives of the people and as a consulting body.

Essences: These were strict legalists who looked for two messiahs to come. They were separatists and lived in segregated communities.

Galileans: This party, which arose in northern Palestine, followed Judas of Galilee who headed a rebellion against foreign domination. They were political fanatics who were insistent on their own rights and unconcerned about the rights of others.

Herodians: The Herodians were a political party of Herod, who was the king of Galilee at the time of Jesus. They supported Rome and agreed to taxes being paid to Rome rather than to God. They opposed the Messianic claims of Jesus because of the disturbance these claims caused among the people. Religiously, they were mainly Sadducees.

Levites: The Levites were descendants of Levi who were in charge of the tabernacle and its services.

Pharisees: Their religion centered on obedience to the law which they interpreted, extended, followed, and enforced. They not only adhered to the written law, but also numerous oral traditions which had been passed from generation to generation. They were the largest group of Jews and the most influential. They believed in resurrection after death.

Priests: The Jewish priesthood was ordained by God in the time of Moses. Their original function was strictly religious, but after the nation's return from Babylonian captivity the civil power of the state passed into their hands. In the time of Christ the priests, for the most part, were carnal, were enemies of Jesus, and delivered Him to be crucified.

Sadducees: They were the governing religious group. They were aligned politically with the Romans who ruled Israel at the time of Christ. They did not believe in the resurrection, they accepted only the written law, and they rejected oral traditions.

Samaritans: The Samaritans were a mixed race living in the province of Samaria who served their own gods while also expressing allegiance to the true God. When the second temple was being built, the Samaritans offered to help but were refused (Ezra 4:1-3). This resulted in enmity between them and the Jews.

Sanhedrin: The Sanhedrin consisted of the chief priests; the scribes or lawyers; and the elders. The council had up to seventy-two members, the High Priest being the president.

Scribes: In New Testament times, the scribes were students, interpreters, and teachers of Old Testament Scriptures and were held in high esteem by the people. They were opponents of Christ, and were publicly denounced by Him for making the Word of God ineffective by their traditions. They were also called lawyers in the New Testament.

Zealots: These were fanatical nationalists who advocated violence as a means of liberation from Roman rule.

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN THE GOSPELS

Genealogies: Two genealogical records are provided in the gospels, one in Matthew 1 and the other in Luke 3. These record the lineage of Jesus Christ.

Disciples: For biographical information concerning the disciples, see the additional study entitled "Disciples Of Jesus."

Alexander: A son of Simon of Cyrene, the man who bore Christ's cross.

Anna: A prophetess in Jerusalem who declared the infant Jesus to be the Messiah.

Annas: Annas continued to be called "High Priest" even after he had been expelled from that position. This would explain the fact that both Annas and Caiaphas are called High Priests at the same time. Jesus was brought before him for judgment and he sent Him to Caiaphas, his son-in-law.

Barabbas: A robber and murderer, condemned to death, who was released so that Jesus might be crucified.

Bartimaeus: A blind beggar whom Jesus healed.

Caesar Augustus: The first Roman Emperor who was ruling when Jesus was born.

Caesar Tiberius: The son-in-law of Augustus who followed him as emperor. He was emperor when Jesus was crucified.

Chuza: A steward of Herod Antipas. His wife, Joanna, ministered to Jesus materially.

Cleopas: A follower of Jesus to whom He appeared on the way to Emmaus.

Cyrenius: A Roman governor of Syria who was in power when the census edict was issued which required Joseph and Mary to go to Bethlehem.

Elisabeth: The wife of Priest Zacharias, the mother of John the Baptist, and a kinswoman of Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Herods:

Herod the Great: Was appointed governor of Galilee by Julius Cesar. Later he ruled over most of Palestine. He had nine wives; was a cruel tyrant; massacred infants at Bethlehem; and died a tragic death.

Herod Antipas: The son of Herod the Great who, at the request of Salome and Herodias, murdered John the Baptist.

Herod Archelaus: Herod the Great's son who ruled in Judea after his father's death and when Jesus was an infant.

Herod Philip: Son of Herod the Great. Herodias was his evil wife, and Salome was his daughter.

Herodias: Married to Herod Philip; had a daughter named Salome. She requested the beheading of John the Baptist.

James: A son of Joseph and Mary and a half-brother of Jesus. James wrote the epistle which bears his name.

Joanna: The wife of Chuza, Herod's steward. She ministered to Jesus materially and was present at His tomb.

John the Baptist: The son of Zacharias and Elisabeth, John was the predicted forerunner of Jesus. He preached about sin, judgment, and repentance. He baptized many in the Jordan River, including Jesus. John was beheaded by Herod Antipas at the request of Salome and Herodias. He is a key character in the Gospels. Study his life using the following references:

- John's ministry predicted by Isaiah (40:3-5) and Malachi (3:1).
- John's birth: Luke 1.
- John's position: John 1:6-18.
- His clothes and food: Matthew 3:4.
- His message: Matthew 3:2-10; Luke 3:3-6,13-14; John 1:29.
- His testimony: John 1:20,23,27; 3:29-30.
- John's predictions: John 3:34-35; Luke 3:16.
- John baptizes Jesus: Matthew 4:13-17.
- His need for reassurance that Jesus was the Messiah: Matthew 11:2-6.
- John is imprisoned for confronting King Herod about his unlawful marriage: Mark 6:14-29.
- John Baptist is martyred: Matthew 14:1-12.
- The tribute to John Baptist by Jesus: Matthew 11:7-11.

Joseph: The husband of Christ's mother, Mary, and a carpenter in Nazareth.

Joseph of Arimathaea: A member of the Sanhedrin who was a secret disciple. He secured the body of Jesus and placed it in his own tomb.

Joses: A son of Joseph and Mary and a half-brother of Jesus.

Jude: A son of Joseph and Mary and a half-brother of Jesus. Jude wrote the epistle which bears his name.

Lazarus: Brother of Martha and Mary of Bethany, who was raised from the dead by Jesus.

Malchus: A servant of the High Priest, whose ear Peter cut off, and who was healed by Christ.

Martha: The sister of Mary and Lazarus of Bethany.

Mary: The mother of Jesus Christ and the wife of Joseph.

Mary Magdalene: Jesus cast seven demons out of her, she became a devoted follower, and He appeared to her privately after His resurrection.

Mary of Bethany: The sister of Martha and Lazarus of Bethany.

Nicodemus: A Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin. He originally came to Jesus by night inquiring about how to be born again. He became a secret follower of Jesus, argued in behalf of Christ before the Sanhedrin, and helped prepare Christ's body for burial.

Pontius Pilate: A Roman who was appointed Procurator of Judea by Tiberius Caesar. He tried and condemned Jesus to death. Pilate was later summoned to Rome, was banished from the empire, and eventually took his own life.

Rufus: A son of Simon of Cyrene, a man who bore Christ's cross.

Salome: One of the women who travelled with Jesus and ministered to Him of her substance. She was at the crucifixion and at the tomb on resurrection morning

Salome: The daughter of Philip and Herodias who danced before Herod and, at her mother's instigation, asked for the head of John the Baptist.

Simeon: A devout man who recognized the infant Jesus to be the promised Messiah.

Simon: The father of Judas Iscariot.

Simon, brother of Jesus: A son of Joseph and Mary and a half-brother of Jesus.

Simon, the leper: A leper who lived at Bethany.

Simon, the Pharisee: A Pharisee who entertained Jesus as a guest; in whose house a woman anointed Jesus' feet; and to whom Jesus spoke the parable of the two debtors.

Simon, the Cyrenian: A Cyrenian man who was compelled to bear Christ's cross to Calvary. The father of Alexander and Rufus.

Susanna: A woman who ministered to the material needs of the Lord.

GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATIONS IN THE GOSPELS

Aenon: A place near Salim where John baptized.

Bethany: Where Lazarus and his sisters lived. A mile east of Jerusalem on the road to Jericho.

Bethesda: A pool at Jerusalem where supernatural healings occurred.

Bethlehem: Six miles south of Jerusalem. Birthplace of Jesus.

Bethphage: A village on the road between Jerusalem and Jericho.

Bethsaida: Two miles from the Sea of Galilee. Home of Peter, Andrew, and Philip. Jesus fed a multitude near here.

Caesarea/Philippi: At the foot of Mount Hermon and the site where Peter made a great confession of faith.

Cana: About four miles northeast of Nazareth. Jesus performed His first miracle here and it was the home town of Nathanael.

Capernaum: Northwest of the Sea of Galilee, this city became Christ's headquarters for ministry. He performed many miracles and called Matthew to discipleship here.

Chorazin: North of Capernaum, by the Sea of Galilee, where Christ performed mighty works.

Dalmanutba: On the shore of the Sea of Galilee, near Magdala.

Decapolis: A district consisting of ten cities in the northeastern part of Galilee including Scythopolis, Damascus, Hippos, Philadelphia, Gadara, Pella, Dion, Gerasa, Kanatha, and Raphana. Many came to hear Jesus from this region.

Egypt: Joseph and Mary took Jesus here as an infant to protect him from the evil King Herod.

Emmaus: About seven miles from Jerusalem. After the resurrection, Jesus appeared to two of His disciples on the road leading here and upon arrival in the town revealed Himself to the others.

Ephraim: A city northeast of Jerusalem to which Jesus and His disciples retired to rest.

Gennesaret: A fertile plain on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. The scene of miracles during Christ's ministry.

Gergesa: On the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Two demon-possessed men were healed near here and the demons entered into a herd of swine.

Gethsemane: A garden near the foot of the Mount of Olives. Jesus often prayed here and it was the scene of His agonizing prayer preceding His arrest and death.

Golgotha: Located outside the wall of Jerusalem, this is where Jesus was crucified. Also known as Calvary and the place of the skull.

Gomorrah: One of the cities of the Jordan Valley destroyed by fire for its iniquity. Referred to by Jesus.

Jericho: A city near the Dead Sea where two blind men were healed by Jesus and where Zacchaeus, the tax collector, lived.

Jerusalem: The Jewish capital. Much of the ministry of Jesus occurred here, plus His trial. His death and resurrection happened just outside of its walls.

Jordan: The major river of Palestine where John baptized many, including Jesus.

Kidron/Cedron: A ravine between Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives.

Magdala: On the west shore of the Sea of Galilee, about five miles southeast of Nazareth. Jesus raised a widow's dead son to life near here.

Nephthali: This city is mentioned with Zebulon as "by the way of the Sea beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles".

Nazareth: A city about twenty miles south-west of Capernaum. The home town of Joseph and Mary, and of Jesus until He entered into His public ministry. The inhabitants here rejected Him.

Nineveh: Capital of the Assyrian Empire. Preached to by Jonah; prophesied against by Nahum; referred to by the Lord.

Olivet/Mount of Olives: A ridge on the east of Jerusalem which is separated from the city by the Kidron valley. It was the scene of some of the most sacred events in the life of Christ, including His ascension to Heaven. It is to this mountain He will return.

Salim: John baptized near here.

Sarepta: The Old Testament town of Zarephath, located near Sidon, referred to by Christ.

Sidon: The Old Testament Zidon, a city of Phoenicia, north of Tyre. Many people came from this city to hear Jesus and it was into this region that Jesus eventually withdrew with His disciples.

Siloam: A pool at Jerusalem where a blind man was healed when Jesus sent him there to wash.

Sodom: A city in the plain of the Jordan where Lot resided in Old Testament times. Destroyed by fire. Referred to by Christ.

Sychar: A town on the eastern slope of Mount Ebal in Samaria near Jacob's well. This is where the Samaritan woman resided to whom Christ ministered in John 4.

Tiberias: A city on the west of the Sea of Galilee, south of Magdala.

Tyre: A city of Phoenicia near where Jesus healed the daughter of a Syrophenician woman.