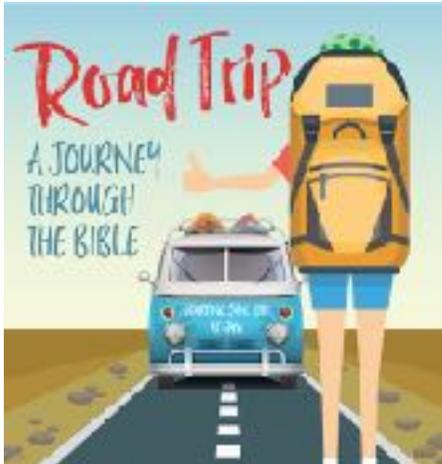


## SESSION SIX: THE GOSPEL TRUTH



- The SETTING of the Gospels
- The SOURCE of the Gospels
- The SORTING of the Gospels
- The STORY of the Gospels
- The SUPREMACY of the Gospels

### THE SETTING OF THE GOSPELS

**The Time:** The four canonical Gospels are set in the early first century; the setting is more “Old Testament” than New Testament. The writing of the Gospels occurred mid to late first century. Israel had been under the rule of the Roman empire for a century as Jesus’ ministry began.

**The Place:** The Gospel accounts are set entirely within Roman Judea. Specifically, the territories of Galilee, Hebrew Judea, and the city of Jerusalem are the focus.

**The Language:** Jesus and many of his contemporaries would have been trilingual. Hebrew was the formal, native language of the Jewish people, and used at the Temple, in the synagogues, and in formal education. Aramaic, a Semitic language of the region, was commonly used day to day. Greek was a “foreign” language, but was the language of the Empire. The Gospels were written primarily in Greek, with some Aramaic references.

**The Politics:** At the time of the Gospels, Roman Judea had several layers of ruling bureaucracy.

Caesar or Emperor

(Augustus 27 BC - 14 AD and Tiberius 14 AD - 37 AD)

Ethnarchy (Ethnic Leader)

Roman Governor (Five Conclaves)

Herod the Great (40 BC - 1 AD)

Pontius Pilate (26 AD - 36 AD)

Herod Antipas (6 AD - 40 AD)

Philip the Tetrarch (4 BC - 34 AD)

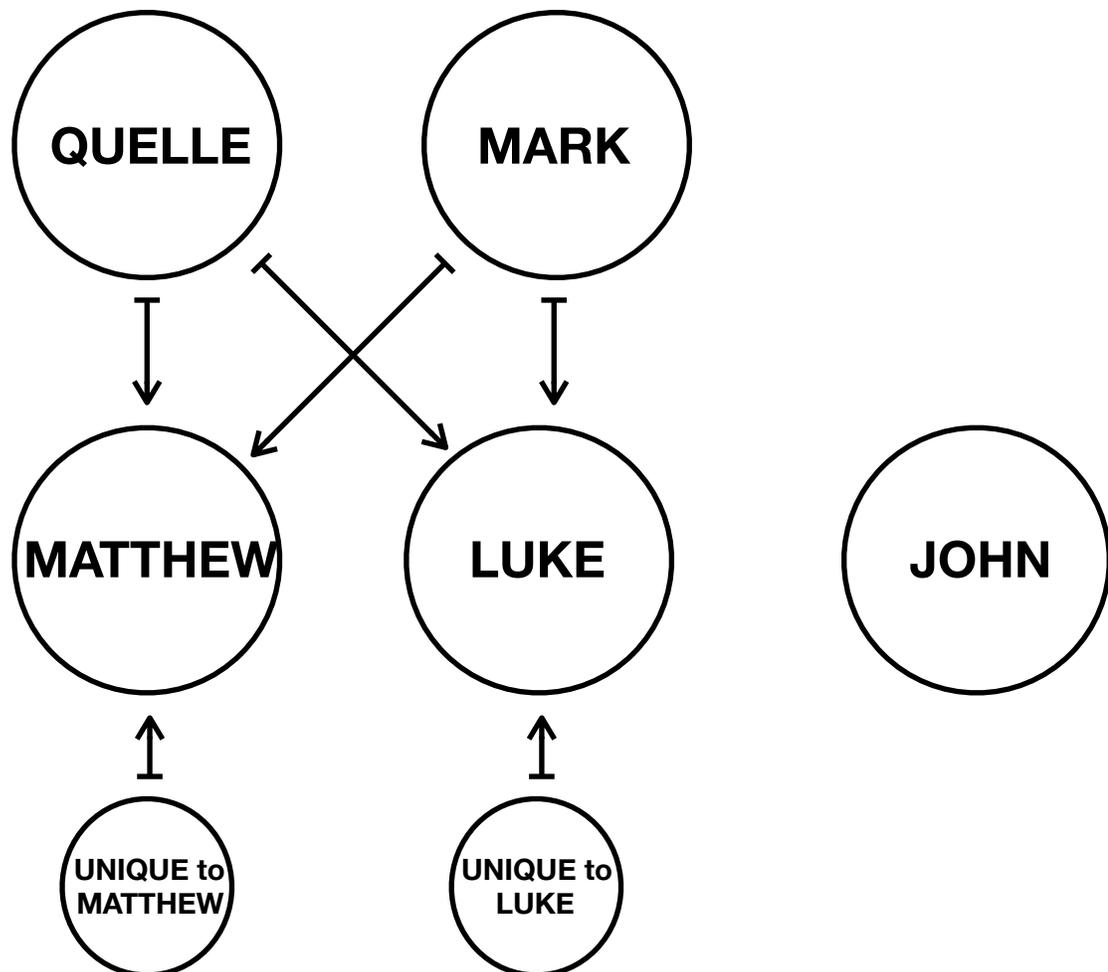
**The Religion:** There are three major sects mentioned in the New Testament: The Pharisees, the Saducees, and the Zealots. A fourth group, the Essenes, were influential.

The Sanhedrin was the most important religious organization. It was a group of 71 men - priests, elders, scholars, and scribes - that acted as a sort of supreme court. The Temple's High Priest was the presiding officer. Joseph Caiaphas (18 AD - 36 AD) was High Priest at the time of Jesus.

## THE SOURCE OF THE GOSPELS

The teachings and story of Jesus would have begun as an oral tradition, but would have been put in narrative form fairly early. That first hypothetical document is referred to as "The Q Source," after the German word *Quelle*, meaning "source."

Augustine's conclusions prevailed for centuries (The Gospels are in order by date), but scholarship over the last 200 years has pointed to Q and Mark as being earliest, followed by Matthew, Luke, and John.



Ninety percent of Mark is found within Matthew. Fifty percent of Mark is found within Luke. Twenty-Five percent of Matthew and Luke are not found in Mark (likely Q). Twenty percent of Matthew is unique. Thirty-five percent of Luke is unique. Ninety percent of John is unique.

## THE SORTING OF THE GOSPELS

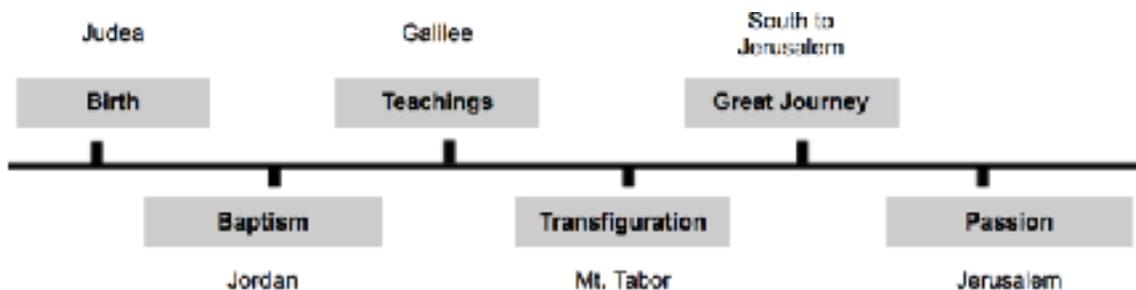
There are two sorts or types of Gospels: The Synoptics (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) and the Gospel of John.

Synoptic (syn and optic) means, “the same eye” or “the same vision.” Matthew, Mark, and Luke share a common view of Jesus. Roughly, they follow the same script and timeline of Jesus’ life.

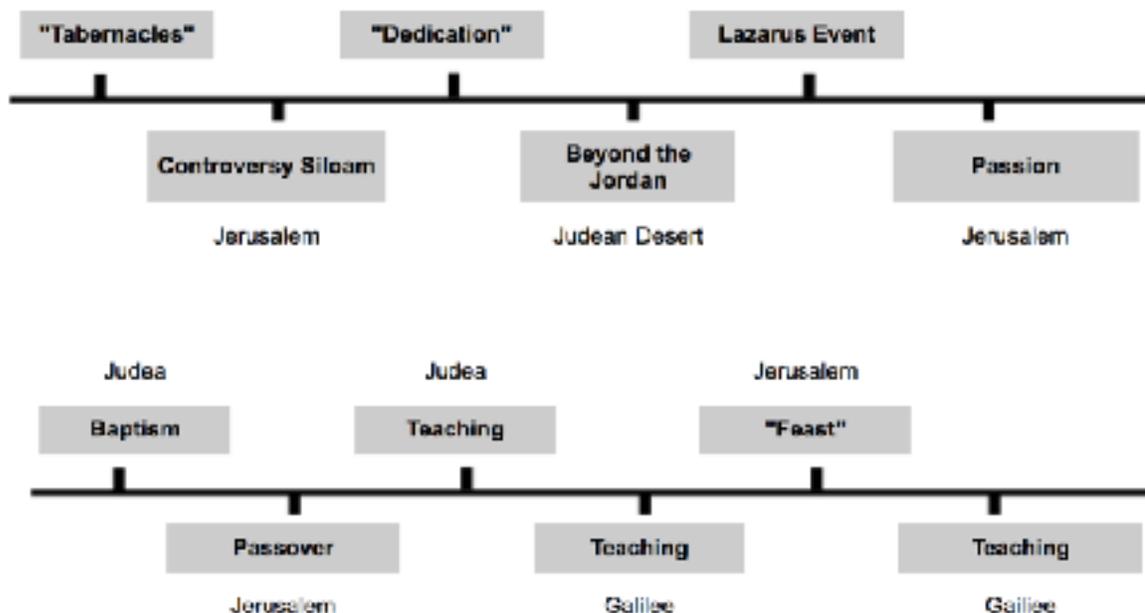
The Synoptic Gospels are unified when it comes to the message and preaching of Jesus: “The Kingdom of God is at hand.”

John’s message is the clearest example of “holy propaganda.” John wrote “so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life by the power of his name.”

## THE SYNOPTICS TIMELINE



## JOHANNINE TIMELINE



## **THE STORY OF THE GOSPELS**

**MATTHEW:** Jesus is portrayed as the rightful King of God's New Creation

Author: Traditionally ascribed to Matthew, the disciple of Jesus

Time: Likely written just before 70 AD, due to details of Olivet Discourse

Characteristics: A teaching gospel with five major discourses; well organized; use of the phrase "kingdom of heaven" as a synonym for the "kingdom of God;" directed toward Jewish readers, but is defiant rather than inviting; Jesus portrayed as the fulfillment of prophecy.

Unique Passages: Matthew 5-7 (The Sermon on the Mount); Matthew 16 and 18 (Only Gospel to mention the church); Matthew 24-25 (The Olivet Discourse).

Key Verses: Matthew 7:24-27 - "Anyone who listens to my teaching and follows it is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won't collapse because it is built on bedrock. But anyone who hears my teaching and doesn't obey it is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand. When the rains and floods come and the winds beat against that house, it will collapse with a mighty crash."

**MARK:** Jesus is portrayed as the suffering Servant of God

Author: Traditionally assigned to John Mark, associate of Simon Peter

Time: The earliest Gospel, like written in early 60s AD.

Characteristics: An action oriented Gospel; shortest of the four Gospels; written for the Roman mind with Jesus portrayed as a man of power and action with many miracles; uses or condenses the Q source;

Unique Passages: Mark 7 (Healing of a deaf and mute man); Mark 14 (Episode in the Garden of Gethsemane)

Key Verses: Mark 10:42-45 - "You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of everyone else. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many."

**LUKE** - Jesus is portrayed as the One anointed by the Spirit

Author: The accepted author is Luke, a companion of the Apostle Paul

Time: Written after Matthew and likely in the late 70s AD.

Characteristics: Luke was a Gentile, making him the only such writer in the New Testament; a book appealing to the Greek or Hellenized mind; emphasis on beauty, poetry, and gives preference to women and outsiders; Luke is part of a two volume set that includes Acts.

Unique Passages: Luke 1 (Dedicated to an individual); Luke 2 (Birth account of Jesus); Luke 19 (Story of Zacchaeus); Luke 24 (Emmaus Road) and a dozen parables not found in the other Gospels (Good Samaritan, Prodigal Son, etc.).

Key Verses: Luke 4:17-21 - "The scroll of Isaiah the prophet was handed to Jesus. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where this was written: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the Lord's favor has come.' He rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the attendant, and sat down. All eyes in the synagogue looked at him intently. Then he began to speak to them. 'The Scripture you've just heard has been fulfilled this very day!'"

**JOHN** - Jesus is portrayed as the true and living way

Author: John, the beloved disciple has been the traditional writer, but scholarship has never been unified.

Time: If John is the writer, then the book was written in the early 90s AD. If it is a later writer, as late as 120 AD. Scholars agree that it was the last Gospel written and had early credibility with the church.

Characteristics: A "universal" Gospel written to a broad audience; contains mostly unique material not found in the synoptics; chronology is either radically different from the others, or non-linear; contains seven "signs" or miracles, and seven "I Am" statements.

Unique Passages: Ninety percent of the Gospel is unique. Of particular interest is John 1, John 3, the Upper Room/Garden Discourse of Jesus in John 14-17.

Key Verses: John 20:29-31 - "Jesus said, 'You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing me.'" The disciples saw Jesus do many other miraculous signs in addition to the ones recorded in this book. But these are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life by the power of his name.

## **THE SUPREMACY OF THE GOSPELS**

From Session One: Don't read the Bible as a "flat" document.

"Long ago God spoke many times and in many ways to our ancestors through the prophets. And now in these final days, he has spoken to us through his Son..." Hebrews 1:1-2