

The Life of Jesus: History's Great Love Story

The Amazing Life of Jesus: History's Great Love Story

Appendix 3: The Gospels

The Gospels are not a biography, although much of their good news is biographical. They tell the story of God's love revealed perfectly in Jesus.

Matthew tells the love story

A despised, hated tax collector for Rome, Matthew admired Jesus and left his lucrative business to travel on foot with Jesus and the growing crowd of his followers. A staunch Jew, Matthew likely wrote his love story in Aramaic, the lingua franca of the Middle East at that time.

They copied their Scriptures (our Old Testament) in Hebrew scrolls, but from the time of the Jews return from captivity in Babylon, around 538 BC, they spoke Aramaic, a dialect of Hebrew, which spread through the Middle East. It became the native language of Palestine used by Jesus and his followers.^[1] Matthew quotes liberally from the Hebrew Scriptures, showing that Jesus fulfilled their prophecies. Matthew's story was reproduced in common Greek, used widely at that time following Alexander the Great's conquests.

Matthew the evangelist wrote especially for Jews. He begins his gospel presenting Jesus Christ as the son of David, the son of Abraham. He ends his gospel with the Great Commission declaring that Jesus sends his followers into all nations. In Jesus, God's covenant embraces the whole world.

This radical evangelistic missionary gospel shocked traditional Jews. Matthew insists that Jesus was the long awaited Messiah, backing up his claims with many quotations from the Old Testament. He argues that Jesus did not do away with the Scriptures, but fulfilled them.^[2] He emphasizes the missionary nature of Jesus's ministry and of his church.

This gospel continually confronted the Jewish Christian community as well as other Jews. Here is a persistent and urgent call to mission. The good news is for all people, not only for Jews. Matthew begins his Gospel telling of the coming of Jesus the Messiah who proclaims God's kingdom. The figure of Jesus the Messiah is announced by John the Baptist, as prophesied.

The beginning of the ministry in Galilee shows Christ's design for life in God's kingdom, again fulfilling prophecy. Chapters 5-7 gather the words of Jesus together in The Sermon on the Mount in which we are challenged to seek first the kingdom of God. Here is the kingdom

charter, the ethics of kingdom living. The chapters that follow demonstrate God's kingdom in the works of Jesus.

Matthew gathers the discourses of Jesus as teaching segments throughout his narrative. He often uses the phrase "kingdom of heaven" for kingdom of God in typical Jewish reverence for the word *God*.

Jesus's ministry is summarised in Matthew 4:23 as teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness. This statement introduces the words and works of Jesus in chapters 5-9. Then in Matthew 9:35, the same statement is repeated. Here it introduces the mission of Jesus's followers.

The mission discourse, commencing from Matthew 9:35, tells of Jesus's plan for the spread of God's kingdom. His disciples will continue his ministry. They will proclaim the kingdom of God.

The chapters following the mission discourse show the radical nature of the mystery of God's kingdom. This mystery is revealed by Jesus to those committed to him, but concealed from others, as indicated in the parable discourses of chapter 13.

Matthew, the only gospel writer to use the word church, points out that Jesus's church has his authority.^[3] The church is the agent of God's kingdom, and manifests the kingdom in the world.

Tensions with the keepers of Israel's traditions reached flash point and boiled over into Jesus's arrest and execution. That is the volatile setting in which Jesus pressed his authority and invitation as the ministry ends. The king is crowned with thorns and crucified. Apparent defeat in death is then turned into the amazing victory of resurrection. Christ the King reigns. We all ultimately acknowledge his reign in the end. In Jesus's victory we see God's kingdom fulfilled.

Mark tells the love story

Probably as a young man in Jerusalem he knew and hung around Jesus and his followers. His love story is a condensed version, the shortest account, and possibly the first cab off the rank. It's likely that Matthew and Luke both used much of Mark's story in their similar stories, now called the three Synoptic Gospels.

Mark may have been the young man he alone refers to who ran off leaving his linen sheet with the mob who grabbed him in Gethsemane when Jesus was arrested late at night. His family may have lived in a big house where many met to pray and it may have had the large upper room where Jesus ate the Passover. Mark, possibly known as John Mark, joined Paul and Mark's cousin Barnabas and then joined Barnabas again on missionary journeys, and was with Paul in Rome. He travelled with Peter who called him 'my son' and most likely gave him most of the information he used in his Gospel. Jerome, a leader in the early church, told how Mark established the church in Alexandria in Egypt. ^[4]

Mark gives a vigorous, concise account of Jesus. The narrative moves swiftly. A brief prologue leads immediately into Jesus's ministry as he appears proclaiming and demonstrating the kingdom of God. Kingdom life fills the pages.

Central to that drama is the cross. Mark has been described as a passion narrative with an introduction. Jesus is introduced as the Son of God in the first verse. Chapters 1-8 reveal the mystery of the Son of God seen in Jesus's three year ministry, based in Galilee.

Then the drama shifts in chapter 8, with Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah. Jesus immediately predicts his death and prepares his disciples for it. The Messiah must sacrifice his life. The way of the Son of Man is the way of the cross. Chapters 11-16 describe that final week in Jerusalem.

Holy Week, the last week of the earthly life of Jesus, may be summarized this way as a general guide. The different Gospels record different events, each one telling the Gospel, the good news, in their own way. So this arrangement is just an estimate of the sequence of the momentous developments in Holy Week.

This summary of events in Holy Week follows the outline in Mark's Gospel:

Palm Sunday - Day of Demonstration
Mark 11:1-11 (Zech 9:9) - Jesus enters Jerusalem

Monday - Day of Authority
Mark 11:12-19 - fig tree rebuked, temple cleansed

Tuesday - Day of Conflict
Mark 11:20 - 13:36 - debates with leaders

Wednesday - Day of Preparation
Mark 14:1-11 - anointed at Bethany

Thursday - Day of Farewell
Mark 14:12-42 - last supper

Good Friday - Day of Crucifixion
Mark 14:43 - 15:47 - trials and death

Saturday - Day of Sabbath
Mark 15:46-47 - tomb sealed

Easter Sunday - Day of Resurrection
Mark 16:1-18 - resurrection appearances

These passages remind us of events from the most momentous week in all history, and indeed in all eternity. The Lamb of God, slain from the foundation of the world, took our sin upon himself, died in our place, and conquered death. He alone is the Saviour of the World. All who believe in him, all who trust him, will not die but live for ever with him.

Luke tells the love story

Physician and historian, Luke gives us unique accounts of the earliest days in Jesus' life. The only Gentile author in the Bible, he addressed his two books, Luke-Acts, to his Gentile friend Theophilus. He provides carefully researched historical insights into Jesus and his followers. He alone records Jesus' famous and confronting parables of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son.[\[5\]](#)

Dr Luke carefully researched the accounts of healing and miracles. He joined the teams on Paul's second and third missionary journeys through Turkey (then called Asia or Asia Minor) and Greece, and on their fateful trip to Rome which included being shipwrecked on Malta. He carefully described those adventures in the 'we passages' in Acts. Paul valued him highly.[\[6\]](#)

Luke wrote with a different emphasis from the other writers of the New Testament who all grew up steeped in Israel's traditions. He writes especially for his community.

Luke the historian describes Jesus's central place in human events. Jesus is the Saviour of the whole world. No one is excluded from God's offer of salvation in Jesus. The poor, despised and outcasts (such as Gentiles) are especially invited into the kingdom of God. Luke gives a clear, ordered account of the spread of God's kingdom in the ministry of Jesus (Luke's Gospel) and in the early church (The Acts of the Apostles).

Luke the traveller makes "journey" a strong theme in both his books. He tells of events along the way, on the road. This especially applies to Jesus's final journey to Jerusalem. That last journey began after Peter's declaration that Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus explained that terms of his death and resurrection.

Luke the missionary, who often accompanied Paul, tells of the mighty power of the Holy Spirit, first in Jesus, then in his followers, and then in the church's missionary expansion. Luke refers to the Holy Spirit often in both his gospel and The Acts of the Apostles.

Luke the doctor, emphasizes Jesus's compassion and healing power for all who came to him. His gospel abounds with stories of Jesus's care for people. He includes many accounts of Jesus's compassion for the poor and for outcasts.

Luke the evangelist, tells of Jesus's saving power and includes some of the most famous parables which summarise the good news of God's kingdom. Parables of the prodigal son, the lost coin, the good Samaritan, the rich man and Lazarus, and the rich fool are unique to Luke's evangelism story. So are the accounts of the Samaritan leper, the sinful woman who anointed Jesus's feet, and Zacchaeus. These were despised people who responded to Jesus.

If you have a Bible with section headings containing cross-references, as in the Good News Bible and New Revised Standard Version, you can easily locate the passages unique to Luke. They have no cross-references. Those passages give a feel for Luke's emphasis in telling the good news about the kingdom of God.

John tells the love story

He may have been Jesus' young cousin, a son with his older brother James of the successful fisherman Zebedee who employed others in his business in partnership with Simon and Andrew. John's mother may have been a sister to Jesus' mother Mary, identified by early church leaders as Salome. She wanted Jesus to allow her sons to sit beside him in his new kingdom. She was with John and with Mary at the crucifixion where Jesus committed his mother into John's care. John writes about the disciple whom Jesus loved, usually identified as John himself, who reclined on Jesus' chest at the last supper.^[7]

John's Gospel and his three letters emphasize God's love revealed in Jesus. Famous verses like John 3:16 and 1 John 3:16 describe that love:

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16)

"We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another." (1 John 3:16)

John was an eye-witness to the ministry of Jesus. He belonged to the inner circle of disciples with his brother James and with Peter the natural leader. John may have been the youngest of the disciples.

Throughout his Gospel, John emphasized that he recorded what he had seen and heard. He states early in the Gospel that he, with others, witnessed the life of Jesus the Christ, the Logos, the living Word of God.

John describes how he was there at the crucifixion witnessing that stupendous, agonizing death. He emphasizes that he wrote so that his readers would believe in Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God.

"Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name." (John 20:30-31)

^[1] Matthew 1:21, The Passion Translation.

^[2] Matthew 5:17.

^[3] Matthew 16:18-19; 18:17-18.

^[4] Mark 14:12-16, 50-52; Acts 1:12-14; 12:12, 25; 13:5, 13; 15:36-39; Colossians 4:10; 2 Timothy 4:11; 1 Peter 5:13; and <http://www.ldolphin.org/johnmark.html>.

^[5] Luke 1-2; 10:25-37; 15:11-32.

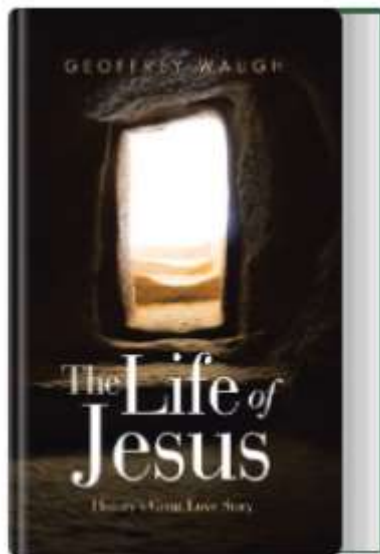
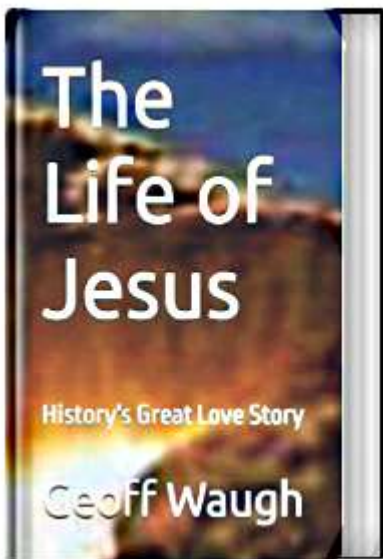
^[6] Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-21:18; 27:1-28:16; Colossians 4:14; 2 Timothy 4:11; Philemon 24.

^[7] Matthew 20:20-21; 27:56; John 13:23; 19:25.

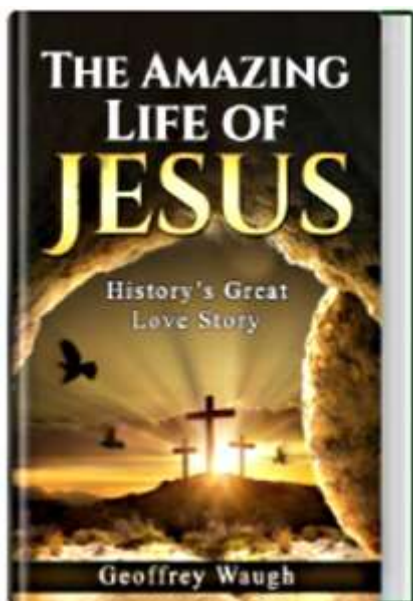
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