



Understanding The Gospels and Acts

The Gospels

Most scholars classify them as ancient biography.

Pericopes: Individual Jesus stories that existed in the oral tradition.

"Mark having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately whatsoever he remembered. It was not, however, in exact order that he related the sayings or deeds of Christ.

For he neither heard the Lord nor accompanied Him. But afterwards, as I said, he accompanied Peter, who accommodated his instructions to the necessities [of his hearers], but with no intention of giving a regular narrative of the Lord's sayings.

Papias, Bishop of Hieropolis (CE60-130)

The Exposition of the Oracles of the Lord; Chapter 6

DAY 29



What is a “gospel” message?

εὐαγγέλιον (euangelion = good news)

They were stories rooted in real events told on the assumption that the events proclaimed have changed the actual reality of the listener.

The gospels are stories that invite us into a worldview and a way of being human in this new Kingdom that has been inaugurated.

Reading and interpreting the Gospels

We should work to interpret each Gospel according to its author’s intent and flow, more than comparing portions of each gospel to the others.

MATHEW

- **Purpose:** present Jesus as the promised and long-awaited Jewish Messiah; as Israel’s God in the flesh bringing a climax to Israel’s history.
- **Jesus** = the better Moses and better David.
 - Organizes pericopes around 5 major teachings (mirroring Torah)
 - Emphasizes fulfillment of OT prophecies
 - Matthew 1:21 serves as the premise of the entire book. “He will save his people”. Matthew tells how God accomplished Israel’s salvation, which spilled out into the whole world.

MARK

- Primarily comes from Peter's account of Jesus.
- **Purpose: two-fold:**
 - Describe Jesus as the Israel's Messiah, the authoritative God-Man, through whom God's kingdom has broken into the whole world.
 - Offer a counter-imperial paradigm.



LUKE

- Focuses on Jesus as the sacrificial lamb and savior
- Focus on the role of females in the gospel story
- Focus on uplifting the downtrodden
- Focus on the Holy Spirit (certainly carries on into Acts)
- Theme: Salvation

JOHN

- Most overtly theological gospel
- Presents Jesus not just as God's messiah, but as God himself (John 1:1)
- Contains the "I am" statements

How to Read the Gospels

1

Embrace the uniqueness of each one.

2

Imperatives

Not laws, as though we must obey them perfectly to stay in relationship with Jesus. Rather, these are descriptions (stated in imperative form) of what normal Christian life should look like because of his acceptance of us.

3

Narratives

Descriptive/prescriptive

4

Parables

Avoid allegorizing and trying to find a second meaning for every detail.



Acts/Historical Narrative

Tells the story of how the good news of Jesus spread through the world.

It is historical narrative, so the same principles apply as interpreting the Old Testament. Again, distinguishing prescriptive from descriptive portions is key. But because this historical narrative concerns our covenant, a higher percentage of Acts will be prescriptive than the Old Testament historical narrative.

One way to distinguish is to ask, "Is this event/phenomenon/practice repeated or is this an isolated event?"

Acts has no real conclusion, meaning Luke saw the story of the gospel breaking into the world as not finished.

What is your one takeaway from this session?

