

GOSPELS

ADVANCED
BIBLE
STUDY
SERIES

David W. Cloud

The Four Gospels
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Contents

Helpful Information.....	5
Between the Testaments.....	11
Introduction: The Four Gospels.....	14
Introduction Matthew	29
Matthew 1 Genealogy and Announcement of Christ's Birth.....	32
Matthew 2 Birth of Christ	35
Matthew 3 John the Baptist.....	40
Matthew 4 Temptation of Christ	43
Matthew 5-7 Sermon on the Mount.....	49
Matthew 8-9 Messianic Miracles	79
Matthew 10 Apostles are Commissioned.....	87
Matthew 11 Christ Praises John and Rebukes Israel.....	91
Matthew 12 Rejection of Christ.....	95
Matthew 13 Mysteries of the Kingdom.....	99
Matthew 14 Death of John the Baptist.....	110
Matthew 15 Additional Miracles	113
Matthew 16 First Mention of the Church.....	117
Matthew 17 Mount of Transfiguration	121
Matthew 18 Children, the Church.....	124
Matthew 19 Divorce	131
Matthew 20 Parable of the Householder	135
Matthew 21 Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem.....	138
Matthew 22 Christ and the Sadducees and Pharisees.....	143
Matthew 23 Christ's Sermon against the Pharisees.....	148
Matthew 24 Prophecy of the Second Coming.....	152
Matthew 25 Parables, Judgment of the Nations	160
Matthew 26 The Lord's Supper	165
Christ's Teaching on the Way to Gethsemane.....	177
Christ's High Priestly Prayer (John 17)	187

Matthew 26 Gethsemane	196
Matthew 26-27 Christ's Trial and Crucifixion.....	199
Matthew 28 Christ's Resurrection	213
The Gospel of Mark.....	229
The Gospel of Luke	238
The Gospel of John.....	249
Summary	265
Review Questions.....	267

SAMPLE

Helpful Information

How the Advanced Bible Studies Series can be used

- Private study for the individual Christian
- Sunday Schools
- A textbook in Bible institutes and colleges
- Home schooling curriculum
- Study material in jails and prisons
- Discipling new Christians
- Refresher studies for Bible College graduates
- Expository preaching outlines
- Commentaries (e.g., Genesis, Romans, Hebrews, Revelation)

In what order should the courses be studied?

The best place to start is with the course “How to Study the Bible.” This teaches the principles of how to interpret the Bible and how to study it effectively by means of some of the most important Bible study tools. The 2012 edition of the course is enlarged and improved.

A briefer edition of this is *The Effectual Bible Student*, which is a 12-hour video course. The course, which is the product of 40 years of Bible study and teaching, has life-changing potential. It has four major sections: (1) The spiritual requirements for effectual Bible study, (2) tips for daily Bible study, (3) principles of Bible interpretation, and (4) how to use Bible study tools. It also deals with using Bible study software on a computer, a tablet, or a smartphone. It is a package consisting of the videos of the course and the textbook with review questions for testing. The course notes can be used as a standalone tool by teachers to teach church classes and home schooling programs or can be used for self-study. The package can be purchased as a set of DVDs and textbook, or it can be downloaded for free from www.wayoflife.org. See the Bible Study section of the *Articles Library* using the button at the top of the Way of Life home page.

The next course that we recommend is “Old Testament History and Geography,” which gives an overview of the Bible and how that each part fits together within the whole. The 2014 edition of this course is much enlarged and improved with new maps.

After this we recommend The Four Gospels, then Acts. Both of these have been enlarged and improved in recent years. The new edition of the Four Gospels was published in August 2016 with new maps and PowerPoint presentations.

After that we suggest studying the courses in whatever order best fits your need and interest or that of your class.

The course titles of the Advanced Bible Studies Series are as follows:

Acts
Bible Version Issue
Defense of the Faith
1 Corinthians
Four Gospels
Genesis
Give Attendance to Doctrine
Hebrews
History of the Churches from a Baptist Perspective
History and Geography of the Old Testament
James
Job
New Testament Church
Pastoral Epistles
Proverbs
Psalms
Revelation
Romans
Understanding Bible Prophecy

Currently there are seven other Bible study courses published by Way of Life Literature which are not a part of the Advanced Bible Studies Series.

Bible Times & Ancient Kingdoms
Effectual Bible Student

Keeping the Kids: A course in child training and discipleship
One Year Discipleship Course
Sowing and Reaping: A Course in Evangelism
An Unshakeable Faith: A Course on Christian Apologetics
The Mobile Phone and the Christian Home and Church

About the Review Questions

A lot of time and effort has gone into the creation of the review questions which are designed to draw the student's attention to the most important points of the lessons and to help him remember these points after the course is finished. Each question deals with things that the Bible student needs to keep in mind beyond the life of the course. The review questions go over all of the important points in the lessons, thus pointing the student's attention to the most significant material.

The questions help to focus the student's attention on the things that he should take away from the course and helps him remember these things by providing a means by which he can easily go back to test himself.

If you take the courses by yourself, don't skip over the very important review questions. Find someone who will test you and let them present the review questions to you. It is a very important part of the learning process.

For the classroom setting, the teacher can use our review questions (plus his own, of course) to create appropriate sectional and final tests at the learning level desired.

Course plan for The Four Gospels

1. We cover the book of Matthew thoroughly, almost verse by verse. In this way we will also cover much of the material in Mark and Luke, as these three are called the Synoptic Gospels, meaning they present the same basic view. We will see more about this.
2. We cover John 14-17, which is Christ's ministry to the disciples between the Lord's Supper and Gethsemane.
3. We also examine other material in Mark, Luke, and John that is not contained in Matthew.

What's new in the 2016 edition of *The Four Gospels*?

The 2016 edition of *The Four Gospels* is a major enlargement and refinement of the course. Following are the changes and improvements:

- The material has been greatly enlarged and completely revised throughout. Enlarged and major new studies include the Sermon on the Mount, Christ's teaching in John 13-17, and the evidence for Christ's resurrection.
- The review questions have been expanded.
- The old maps have been replaced with improved ones. We have chosen to license Manna Bible Maps plus selected ones from other sources, including some of our own. We are including a CD with all of the maps used in the course. Teachers and students are urged to purchase a complete set of Manna Bible Maps from www.BibleMaps.com.
- The 2016 edition of *The Four Gospels* is accompanied by 28 PowerPoint presentations containing 1,440 slides with professional photos, graphics, and video clips. These deal with Bible culture, Bible lands and geography, and Bible history.

The PowerPoint presentations are as follows:

Bible Culture Battlement
Bible Culture Camel
Bible Culture Cosmetics, Fashion
Bible Culture Cursed Fig Tree
Bible Culture Ephah Cubit Gerah
Bible Culture False Messiahs
Bible Culture Fine Linen
Bible Culture Fishing
Bible Culture Herodian Lamp
Bible Culture In the Gate
Bible Culture Millstone
Bible Culture Mustard Seed
Bible Culture Olive and Olive Press
Bible Culture Phylactery
Bible Culture Pomegranate
Bible Culture Pottery

Bible Culture Scrolls
Bible Culture Seals
Bible Culture Sycomore Tree
Bible Culture Synagogue
Bible Culture Tombs
Bible Culture Tribute Money
Bible Culture Widow's Mite
Christ's ministry on the Sea of Galilee
Christ's Passion Week
From Jerusalem to Jericho
Herod's Temple and the Roman Era
Israel's Geography

More PowerPoints like this are available in the *Bible Times & Ancient Kingdoms* course, available from Way of Life Literature. This is a package consisting of a book and a DVD with 24 PowerPoint presentations featuring more than 5,000 slides. The presentations are packed with high quality color photos, drawings, and video clips. It also features high quality historical recreations of Bible places and events that we have licensed. *Bible Times and Ancient Kingdoms* is a course on Bible geography, Bible culture, and Bible history. It has a two-fold objective: to present apologetic evidence for the Bible and to give background material to help the student better understand the setting of Bible history. We cover this fascinating history from Genesis to the New Testament, dealing with the Table of the Nations in Genesis 10, the Tower of Babel and Ancient Babylon, Ur of the Chaldees, Egypt, Baal worship, the Philistines, the Canaanites, David's palace, Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, Ahab and Jezebel, the fall of the northern kingdom, the Assyrian Empire, Hezekiah and his times, Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylon, the Medo-Persian Empire, Herod the Great and his temple, the Roman rule over Israel, life in the Roman Empire, and the Roman destruction of Jerusalem. The course also deals with Bible culture, such as weights and measures, plant and animal life, Caesar's coin, the widow's mite, ancient scrolls and seals, phylacteries, cosmetics, tombs, and the operation of ancient lamps, millstones, pottery wheels, seals, and olive presses. *Bible Times and Ancient Kingdoms* begins with an overview of Israel's geography and a timeline of Bible history to give the student a framework for better understanding the material. Each section includes maps to help the student place the events in their proper

location. The course is packed with important but little-known facts that illuminate Bible history and culture.

Student Assignments

- a. Each student is required to read the book of Matthew at least once during the course. Preferably, he should read all four of the Gospels.
- b. As you read, have pen and paper at hand and write down any questions you have about the passages. These will be discussed as we deal with each section.
- c. Find every instance of fulfilled prophecy in the Gospel of Matthew and list the fulfillment as well as the Old Testament prophecy.

For example:

Mat. 1:23 virgin birth (Isa. 7:14)

Mat. 2:5 born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2)

Between the Testaments

1. The time span between Malachi and Matthew was about 400 years.
2. The Jews in Israel continued to prosper and have freedom under Persia and the Greeks until the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BC.
3. After Alexander, the Greek empire was divided among four generals (eventually five). The one who ruled Egypt in the south, Ptolemy, took possession of Jerusalem in 320 BC.

See Map 01 Greece.

4. The king of Syria also claimed Jerusalem, and for the next 100 years, these two nations struggled for its possession.
5. Finally, Antiochus Epiphanes became king of Syria and determined to conquer Palestine and destroy the Jewish religion. He captured Jerusalem and desecrated the temple with pigs and set up the Greek idol Zeus (Jupiter). Antiochus forced the Jewish priests to offer sacrifices to Zeus, and he burned all of the copies of the Scriptures that he could find. In this he was a forerunner of the end-time Antichrist, who will do much the same thing during the tribulation.
6. A priest named Mattathias with his five sons rebelled against Antiochus and were joined by many others. Their family name was Hasmonean, but they are more popularly known as the Maccabees.
 - a. After Mattathias died, his son Judas led the revolt. They drove Antiochus' army out of Jerusalem and cleansed the temple. They held onto Jerusalem until 161 BC, when a massive army from Syria defeated them and Judas was killed.
 - b. While the army was camped and relaxed, savoring their victory over the Jews, Jonathan, the youngest son of the Maccabees, rallied the defeated Jewish forces and coming suddenly and unexpectedly upon the Syrian camp, defeated them and drove them out of the land.
 - c. After the death of Judas, the oldest son of the Maccabees, Simon, ruled the Jewish nation. Then his son, John Hyrcanus, was made the leader. He ruled for 31 years.

d. By the time John's son, Aristobulus, became leader, the moral character of the Jewish nation had deteriorated. The third generation of the Maccabees did not have the spiritual zeal of their fathers.

7. In 65 BC, the Roman general Pompey conquered Jerusalem and made Israel a vassal of the Roman Empire.

See Map 02 Rome.

8. Herod the Great rose to power soon after this and became the king of Judea in about 35 BC.

See the Powerpoint "Herod's Temple and the Roman Era."

a. Herod was the ruler of Judea at the birth of Christ (Mat. 2:1).

b. He was a great builder. He constructed splendid palaces and castles in Jerusalem, Masada, and other places. He made Caesarea Maritima on Israel's coast one of the most glorious of Roman cities, and created a natural harbor there that was one of the wonders of the ancient world.

See the PowerPoint Herod's Temple and the Roman Era.

c. To win the favor of the Jews, Herod expanded and glorified the temple that had been built when the Jews returned from Babylon. It became known as "Herod's Temple," and it is the temple that existed during Jesus' earthly ministry.

d. Herod was a very wicked and cruel king. "In thirty-six years hardly a day passed without someone being sentenced to death. Herod spared no one, neither his own family nor his closest friends, neither the priests nor least of all the people. On his list of victims stand the names of the two husbands of his sister Salome, his wife Mariamne and his sons Alexander and Aristobulus. He had his brother-in-law drowned in the Jordan and his mother-in-law Alexandra put out of the way. Two scholars who had torn down the golden Roman eagle from the gateway of the temple were burned alive. Hyrcanus, the last of the Hasmoneans, was killed. Noble families were exterminated root and branch. Many of the Pharisees were done away with. Five days before his death the old man had his son Antipater assassinated. And that is only a fraction of the crimes of this man who 'ruled like a wild beast'" (Werner Keller, *The Bible as History*, p. 371).

e. Herod's greatest crime was his attempt to murder the infant Jesus by having all male children under two years of age put to death (Mat. 2). He died soon thereafter.

9. Herod the Great's son Herod Antipas ruled in his place.

a. This is the Herod that is mentioned in Luke 3:1 when John the Baptist began his ministry, and this is the Herod who beheaded John (Mat. 14:1-12).

b. This is the Herod who ruled at the time of Jesus' crucifixion (Lk. 23:6-12).

10. It was in the time between the Testaments that the Pharisees and Sadducees rose to power within the Jewish nation.

a. The Pharisees turned the law into a dead religion which focused on external ritual and works apart from faith and which exalted human tradition above the Scriptures.

b. The Sadducees were rationalists who did not believe in the resurrection or in angels. They were influenced by Greek philosophy and "sought to mix a measure of Greek pleasure and vice with their worship of Jehovah" (William Hull, *The Fall and Rise of Israel*).

Introduction: The Four Gospels

“The Old Testament begins with man made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26), while the New Testament begins with God made in the image of man (Jn. 1:14). The man made in the image of God was defeated by Satan in a fruitful garden (Gen. 2:8), while God made in the image of man defeated Satan in a barren desert (Mat. 4:1)” (H.L. Willmington).

1. The Gospels present Jesus Christ as the final and full revelation of God (Heb. 1:3).

Christ is God manifest in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:16). “The incarnation, ‘God with us,’ shows the purpose of His heart, not only to have man with Him, but for Him to be with man. The Lord God walking amid the trees of the garden which His own hands had planted tells of the yearning of a heart which could not *rest content, were He not with His creatures*” (Samuel Ridout, *The Four Gospels*).

Christ is the second Man, the last Adam, who redeems the creation to God and accomplished God’s eternal plan (1 Cor. 15:20-22; 2 Cor. 5:19; Eph. 1:6-10; Col. 1:15-20).

2. The Gospels are written to give a four-fold portrait of Christ. “Taken together, they set forth, not a biography, but a Personality. ... the four Gospels, though designedly incomplete as a story, are divinely perfect as a revelation” (Scofield). The Gospels are like a musical quartet in which the four voices harmonize perfectly into one more beautiful one. The Gospels are like four photographs of an individual, each portrait adding another feature.

a. The emphasis of each individual Gospel:

Matthew - Christ as God’s King

(1) Christ is presented as the “Son of David” (Mat. 1:1). He inherits David’s throne and eternal kingdom.

(2) Matthew does not describe Christ’s lowly birth but only the visit by the wise men (Mat. 2) and their offerings fit for a king.

(3) Matthew gives the entire Sermon on the Mount with the principles of the kingdom (Mat. 5-7).

(4) In Matthew, Christ presents Himself to Israel as the Messiah and is rejected. His rejection by the Jewish leaders is described as the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Mat. 12:22-32).

(5) Only Matthew gives the kingdom parables that describe the kingdom in its mystery form in the church age (Mat. 13).

Mark - Christ as God's Servant

(1) No lineage is given in Mark, because a servant needs none. There is nothing about Christ's birth or early life.

(2) The keyword is "straightway," which is used 19 times in English. This is the language of a servant, who is busy in his master's service. See Mk. 1:10, 18, 20, 21; 2:2, 3:6; 5:29; 6:25, 45, 54; 7:35; 8:10; 9:15, 20, 24; 11:3; 14:45; 15:1.

Luke - Christ as God's Perfect Man

(1) Christ's genealogy is traced back to Adam (Lk. 3:38). He is the last Adam, the second Man.

(2) Luke gives much more information about Christ's birth and early life than any other Gospel (Lk. 1-2).

(3) Luke has a worldwide view, presenting Christ as the Saviour of all of mankind (Lk. 2:10, 30-32; 3:6). Luke gives only one of the parables from Matthew 13, that being the Parable of the Sower (Lk. 8:4-15). This is the parable that emphasizes the sowing of the gospel throughout the world.

(4) Only Luke mentions the angel that strengthened Christ and the great drops of blood (Lk. 22:43-44). This emphasizes Jesus' humanity.

John - Christ as God's Son

(1) The purpose of John's Gospel is that we might know that Jesus is the Son of God (John 20:30-31).

(2) John begins with Christ as the eternal Son of God and contains the most powerful statements of Christ's deity (Jn. 1:1). John gives the I AM sayings of Jesus by which He claimed to be Almighty God (Ex. 3:14). See John 6:48; 8:12, 58; 9:5; 10:9, 11; 11:25; 13:19; 14:6; 15:1.

(3) John contains no genealogy, because the eternal Son of God has no beginning.

(4) John does not contain the more human aspects of Christ's incarnation. There is no manger, no boyhood, no baptism, no temptation.

(5) Only John contains Christ's high priestly prayer (Jn. 17).

(6) John is the only Gospel that does not mention Jesus' struggle in Gethsemane over "the cup" and His prayers to the Father in that regard.

(7) John is the only Gospel that mentions the multitude falling down when Christ speaks "I am He" in Gethsemane (Jn. 18:6).

b. The four-fold portrait of the Gospels shows Christ as the fulfillment of prophecy (Lk. 24:27).

Matthew - Zechariah 9:9 (King)

Mark - Isaiah 42:1 (Righteous Servant)

Luke - Isaiah 7:14 (Perfect Man)

John - Isaiah 9:6 (God)

c. This does not mean that each Gospel presents Christ ONLY in that particular light. "But not only so: for Matthew's King is also Servant, Man, and God; and Mark's Servant is also King, and Man, and God; Luke's Man is also King, and Servant, and God; and John's eternal Son is also King, and Servant, and Man" (Scofield).

3. The Gospels are further divided into two types: The Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke) and the Gospel of John.

a. Synoptic means summary or outline, and it refers to the fact that three of the Gospels present the same basic view of Jesus' life. The Synoptic Gospels deal more with the following:

- (1) the external facts
- (2) the human aspects
- (3) the public discourse
- (4) the Galilean ministry.

b. The Gospel of John deals more with the following:

- (1) the internal facts
- (2) the Divine aspects
- (3) the private discourses

(4) the Judean ministry.

4. Two of the Gospels are particularly geared to different groups of people. Matthew is written especially for the Jews, while Luke is written especially for the Gentiles. (I have read that Matthew is for the Jews, Mark for the Greeks, Luke for the Romans, and John for the Church; but I believe that is less apparent than the clear distinction between Matthew and Luke.)

a. We see this in the accounts of Jesus' birth.

(1) Matthew begins by calling Jesus the Christ or Messiah and by tracing Jesus' genealogy back to Abraham and David (Mat. 1:1). The Jews were familiar with the Messianic prophecies and God's covenants with their forefathers.

(2) Luke begins with the declaration that Luke is giving a true eyewitness record of historic events (Lk. 1:1-4). This is an important introduction for Gentile readers who aren't as familiar with the Old Testament.

b. We see this difference in the miracles that are recorded.

(1) The first miracle in Matthew is the healing of the leper (Mat. 8:1-4), which has a special significance to the Jews. The leper was unclean and illustrated sin and God's judgment.

(2) The first miracle of Luke is the casting out of a demon (Lk. 4:33-36). The pagan nations were very interested in demonology. Many aspects of pagan religion are an attempt to overcome demons.

c. We see this difference in Christ's sermon against the Pharisees.

(1) Matthew 23:23 says the Pharisees had "omitted the weightier matters of the law..." The Jews were familiar with the law of Moses.

(2) Luke 11:42 quotes another situation in which Jesus rebuked the Pharisees, and He says that they "pass over judgment and the love of God." This could be understood even by the Gentiles who did not know the law of Moses.

d. We see this difference in the terms "kingdom of heaven" and "kingdom of God."

(1) Matthew uses "kingdom of heaven" 32 times and "kingdom of God" only five times. The term "kingdom of heaven" is particularly related to the

promised Messianic kingdom as prophesied in Daniel 2:44; 7:13. Twenty-one times in the Old Testament God is called the “God of heaven.”

(2) Luke uses “kingdom of God” 32 times and never uses “kingdom of heaven,” because the Gentiles would not understand that term. They would understand, though, that Luke is saying there is only one God and that He has determined to establish His kingdom on earth.

5. Since the Gospels are not written to give a systematic record of Christ’s earthly life, it is not easy to place all of the events in a perfect timeline. Gospel harmonies are interesting and profitable, but there are questions that cannot be answered with certainty. In some cases, we cannot be absolutely certain of the order of events. When the Bible does not answer a particular question, it means that the question doesn’t need to be answered today. See Deut. 29:29.

6. The Gospels are the product of divine inspiration (Jn. 14:26; 16:13-15). This means that the number of the Gospels was established by the Holy Spirit. The Canon of Scripture was settled by the Spirit, not by man! It means, also, that the words of the Gospels were given by the Holy Spirit. They might or might not have used secondary sources, but they certainly did not depend upon secondary sources or their own faulty memories.

The following section is duplicated in the ABSS course *Give Attendance to Doctrine*. It can be skipped if the teacher and/or student want to go directly to the studies in the Life of Christ.

The unbelieving attack of form criticism. Form criticism or redaction criticism are modernistic theories about the formation of the Gospels.

a. Some aspects of form criticism are as follows:

(1) The gospel writers supposedly used *a common oral tradition* that was passed around among the Christians for some time before anything was written down. Textual critics Alford (1849) and Westcott (1860) promoted this view. Theological modernists commonly believe that the gospel story was passed along for some time in oral form before it was written down.

(2) The gospel writers supposedly *used other sources*. One supposed source is the “Q” document, which does not exist but many false teachers believe this mythical writing was the source of some or all of the four gospels.

(3) The gospel writers supposedly *copied from one another*. One theory is that *Matthew was first written* and Mark and Luke were then based on Matthew. This was the view of textual critics Griesbach (1783) and Hug (1808). It is the official position of the Roman Catholic Church (decreed by the Pontifical Biblical Commission, 1912). Another theory is that *Mark was first written* and that Matthew and Luke are based on Mark plus the mythical Q document. There are endless permeations of these theories. Each prominent form critic strives to make a name for himself by inventing a new twist to this approach.

(4) The gospel writers supposedly *modified things that Jesus did and said*. They added to, subtracted from, and contracted, and otherwise changed the account.

b. Evangelicals and form criticism. It is not only out-and-out modernists who are entertaining unscriptural views of the Gospels.

(1) The following amazing statement from *The Jesus Crisis: The Inroads of Historical Criticism into Evangelical Scholarship* by Robert L. Thomas and F. David Farnell (Kregel, 1998) reveals how deeply evangelicals have been infected with the modernistic thinking of form criticism: “Outspoken evangelical critics have engaged in the same type of dehistoricizing activity as the Jesus Seminar people with whom they differ. If they were to organize among themselves their own evangelical ‘Jesus Seminar,’ the following is a sampling of the issues they would vote on, most of which they would probably pass:

- The author of Matthew, not Jesus, created the Sermon on the Mount.
- The commissioning of the Twelve in Matthew 10 is a group of instructions compiled and organized by the author of the first gospel, not spoken by Jesus on a single occasion.
- The parable accounts of Matthew 13 and Mark 4 are anthologies of parables that Jesus uttered on separate occasions.
- Jesus did not preach the Olivet Discourse in its entirety, as found in three of the gospel accounts.
- Jesus gave His teaching on divorce and remarriage without the exception clauses found in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9.

- In Matthew 19:16-17, the writer changed the words of Jesus and the rich man either to obtain a different emphasis or to avoid a theological problem involved in the wording of Mark's and Luke's accounts of the same event.
- The scribes and Pharisees were in reality decent people whom Matthew painted in an entirely negative light because of his personal bias against them.
- The genealogies of Jesus in Matthew 1 and Luke 3 are figures of speech and not accurate records of Jesus' physical and/or legal lineage.
- The magi who, according to Matthew 2, visited the child Jesus after His birth are fictional, not real, characters.
- Jesus uttered only three or four of the eight or nine beatitudes in Matthew 5:3-12.

"Recognizably, the listed conclusions impinge upon the historical accuracy of the gospel records. Various evangelicals have opted for the stated unhistorical choice in each of the suggested instances. Granted, their reduction of historical precision in the Gospels is not the wholesale repudiation of historical data as is that of the original Jesus Seminar, but that it is a repudiation is undeniable. An acceptance of imprecision is even more noticeable in light of the fact that the above questions are only the tip of the iceberg. An exhaustive list would reach staggering proportions" (Robert L. Thomas and F. David Farnell, *The Jesus Crisis*, pp. 14-15).

(2) An example of the teaching of form criticism among evangelicals is found in a report posted to the internet by Dr. Daniel B. Wallace, Associate Professor of New Testament Studies, Dallas Theological Seminary. In a 35-page report entitled "The Synoptic Problem," Wallace supports the redaction approach to the Gospels, that the Gospels were produced by copying material from secondary sources. Wallace's report is largely a review of Robert H. Stein's "The Synoptic Problem: An Introduction." (The 63-year-old Stein is a professor at the Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.) Wallace says: "Indeed, I have found Stein's book so helpful a synthesis of the issues involved, that to some degree our comments here will be merely a distillation of his work." Note carefully the following excerpts from Wallace's report:

"It is quite impossible to hold that the three synoptic gospels were completely independent from each other. In the least, they had to have shared a common

oral tradition. But the vast bulk of NT scholars today would argue for much more than that.” (“The Synoptic Problem,” p. 1)

“We shall see later that before the Gospels were written there did exist a period in which the gospel materials were passed on orally, and it is clear that this oral tradition influenced not only the first of our synoptic Gospels but the subsequent ones as well” (“The Synoptic Problem,” p. 4).

“The majority of NT scholars hold to Markan priority [Mark was written first and then Matthew and Luke based their gospels upon it] (either the two-source hypothesis of Holtzmann or the four-source hypothesis of Streeter). This is the view adopted in this paper as well” (“The Synoptic Problem,” p. 6).

“One argument concerning Mark’s harder readings which has been (as far as I can tell) completely overlooked is the probability that neither Luke nor Matthew had pristine copies of Mark at their disposal. ... An intermediate scribe is probably responsible—either intentionally or unintentionally—for more than a few of the changes which ended up in Luke and Matthew” (“The Synoptic Problem,” footnote 49).

“Matthew and Luke have in common about 235 verses not found in Mark. ... Only two viable reasons for such parallels can be given: either one gospel writer knew and used the gospel of the other, or both used a common source” (“The Synoptic Problem,” p. 19).

(3) Another example of the evangelical use of form criticism is *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Zondervan, 1992) by D.A. Carson, Douglas Moo, and Leon Morris. When discussing the origin of the Gospels, these men make NO MENTION OF DIVINE INSPIRATION and instead buy into the unbelieving theories of form criticism. Consider this statement: “Moreover, many of the assumptions on which form criticism is based appear to be valid: there was indeed a period of mainly oral transmission of the gospel materials; much of it was probably in small units; there probably was a tendency for this material to take on certain standard forms; and the early church has undoubtedly influenced the way in which this material was handed down. Defined narrowly in this way, there is undoubtedly a place for form criticism in the study of the Gospels” (*An Introduction to the New Testament*, pp. 23, 24). In fact, there is no scriptural validity for any of these assumptions, and all of them fly in the face of divine inspiration. To say that the “early church has undoubtedly

influenced the way in which this material was handed down” is a plain rejection of the doctrine of divine inspiration. Either the Gospels were written by inspiration of the Holy Spirit or they were written by natural processes. There can be no middle ground for a believer.

c. We reject form criticism for the following reasons:

(1) Form criticism is contrary to divine inspiration. The crux of this matter is divine inspiration. Either the Gospels are infallible Scripture, or they are the fallible work of men. There is no middle ground here, and we have no difficulty whatsoever in rejecting all form criticism theories (AND those who hold such theories) and accepting the Bible’s testimony about itself in simple faith.

The Lord Jesus Christ promised that the Holy Spirit would guide the disciples into all truth and would remind them of past events (Jn. 14:26; 16:13-15). Further, the Gospels are Scripture (compare 1 Tim. 5:18 and Mat. 10:10; also see Heb. 2:3), which means they are given by divine inspiration (2 Tim. 3:16). Nothing in the Scripture is there by happenstance or because of man’s will (2 Pet. 1:21). Even Paul, though he was not an eyewitness of the events of Christ’s life, when writing about those things, was taught directly by the resurrected Christ (1 Cor. 11:23).

Thus, the apostles were not dependent upon their own fallible memories in recording the Gospel accounts. They were not dependent upon their own thinking to select which material to present and how to present it. They did not copy from one another. They did not need secondary sources. They wrote by inspiration of God. The Holy Spirit guided each Gospel writer to portray Christ in a special way via the manner in which the material is presented, and to have done such a thing by natural means would have been impossible.

To make room for form criticism, D.A. Carson and his fellow New Evangelical authors of *An Introduction to the New Testament* reject the verbal inspiration of the Gospels and replace it with a more vague “voice inspiration.” They say, “But their failure to preserve the *ipsissima verba Jesu* (the authentic words of Jesus) does not mean that they have tampered with the *ipsisima vox Jesu* (the authentic voice of Jesus)” (p. 44). This is the old modernistic argument that the Gospels give a semblance of what Christ said rather than His actual words. And it a repetition of the modernistic mumbo-jumbo that the Bible is authoritative even though it is not verbally inerrant and infallible.

(2) The Gospels are miraculous upon their very face. They contain not merely eyewitness accounts that could have been produced by men, but many things that could not have been produced by even the most astute human observer. They describe the thoughts and motives of men's hearts, for example. How can that be accounted for on any naturalistic basis? The disciples could hear what Jesus said and see what He did, but they could not reach into His very mind to see, for instance, that He knew the thoughts of men's hearts (i.e., Lk. 5:22; 6:8; 9:47; 11:17). And they could not discern the actual motives of men such as Pilate (i.e., Mk. 15:15). Only God the Holy Spirit could have produced the Gospels. We believe that it is an act of unbelief to look for any other explanation.

(3) If form criticism were true, we would never know for sure what part of the Gospels contains the fallible words of men and what part contains the infallible Word of God. If, as Dallas Seminary professor Daniel Wallace implies, there was a mysterious "Q" document from which some of the Gospel writers drew their information, it will never be known because no such document exists. Dr. Wallace admits that there are dozens of theories within the broad scope of reductionism or form criticism. If redaction theories of the Gospels are true, we are left with endless theorizing rather than established and settled truth.

(4) The theories of form criticism are contrary even to common sense. To think that Matthew and John, who were apostles and who were intimate eyewitnesses to the Gospel accounts, would depend upon Mark or Luke, who were not eyewitnesses, or upon any other human source such as a "Q" document, makes no sense.

(5) If form criticism were true, it would mean that there are errors in the Bible. Even the evangelicals themselves who are dabbling in form criticism reach this conclusion. And if there are errors in the Bible, Jesus was wrong when He stated that the Scripture cannot be broken (Jn. 10:35).

(6) Form criticism does not edify the flock; it entertains scholars. Only someone trained in the finer nuances of modern textual criticism could even understand the reports written by redaction scholars. Ordinarily they do not contain one word of doctrine, reproof, correction, or instruction in righteousness, yet those are the very purposes for which the Holy Scripture was given (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

(7) The alleged contradictions and problems within the Gospels that are raised by those who promote form criticism have been answered satisfactorily without resorting to redaction theories.

For one thing, form criticism ignores the traditional approach to the Gospels, which says the Holy Spirit gave a supernatural four-fold portrait of Christ and that the material in each Gospel was divinely selected from the events of Christ's life to contribute to the individual portrait.

Form criticism also ignores the traditional approach to explaining the apparent contradictions when comparing parallel accounts in the Gospels. Evangelicals who follow form criticism claim that the only satisfactory answer to these apparent contradictions is some sort of redaction view of the writing of the Gospels. D.A. Carson and his co-authors state, "Only a theory that includes as a major component literary interdependence among the Synoptic Gospels is capable of explaining the data" (*An Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 29). And Daniel Wallace says, "When one compares the synoptic materials with John's Gospel, why are there so few verbal similarities? On an independent hypothesis, either John or the synoptics are wrong, or else John does not record the same events at all in the life of Jesus." In fact, the differences and apparent contradictions between the Gospels have been analyzed carefully by men of God through the centuries and satisfactory answers have been given without resorting to fanciful textual criticism. I have a large library of books dealing with the apparent contradictions in the Bible, including many volumes from the 18th and 19th centuries. The problems raised by redaction critics have been answered to the satisfaction of many godly minds. Many of the "problems" in the Gospels are dealt with in our book *Things Hard to Be Understood*.

And though we cannot answer every problem that arises when comparing parallel passages in the Gospels, the solution for a believer is not to give up the doctrine of verbal inspiration or to think that the Gospels do not give us a verbally accurate transmission of Christ's actual words and deeds. The solution is to walk by faith, not by sight, for "without faith it is impossible to please him" (Heb. 11:6).

(8) Form criticism focuses on the *method* of inspiration rather than the *product*. We know that there is a human element in the Scripture in the sense that men wrote the Bible, but the Bible itself doesn't focus on the human

element. We are given brief glimpses of some of the mechanics of the giving of Scripture, such as God speaking face to face with Moses and angels speaking to some of the prophets, but for the most part we do not know the mechanics of inspiration, and we are not instructed to concern ourselves with it. “The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law” (Deut. 29:29). The essential fact is that “ALL scripture is given by inspiration of God.” That is all we need to know, and it is a fact that can be accepted ONLY by faith. It can never be proven or even understood by scholarship. “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Heb. 11:6).

(9) Form criticism is of the devil. It is the devil who loves to cast doubt upon the Word of God. He has been doing this since his conversation with Eve in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:1). He is doing it today through “evangelical” scholars who are trained at the feet of modernists (either directly or through their writings or through other evangelical scholars who sat under modernists). This is the root problem with men such as Daniel Wallace and Robert Stein and D.A. Carson. They are leaning on the work of modernists, and they are trying to impress those same modernists that they, though “evangelicals,” are serious scholars. They are trying to adapt the scholarship of unbelievers to a position of faith, and it is an impossible task. Does God not warn that “evil communications corrupt good manners” (1 Cor. 15:33)? Does God not warn the believer not to sit in the seat of the scornful (Psalm 1:1)? Does God not warn that the words of false teachers eat like a canker and increase ungodliness and overthrow faith (2 Tim. 2:16-18)? Does God not warn that the words of false teachers deceive hearts (Rom. 16:17-18)? The Bible says that two cannot walk together except they be agreed (Amos 3:3), yet today’s “evangelical” scholar is convinced that he can walk together for months and years on end with unbelievers and not be harmed spiritually. It is a delusion.

7. To understand the Gospels, the student must understand the Old Testament (Lk. 24:44-45).