

Ben Siwak - Why Four Gospels

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Why four gospels?

Have you ever wondered why? I've thought about this for years in the back of my mind. Why four gospels? You know, are they four different stories that we're supposed to learn from, or are they all supposed to be blended together? Why are sometimes there contradictions in the narrative or timelines?

Are they supposed to be telling the same story or are they telling different stories?

You know, how are we to answer this when someone says to us, well, this is why we don't believe in them, because they don't actually match all the time. They must be a fiction, you know, and not inspired by God.

But as we go into this, let's kind of define first what kind type of literature they are, because you can't really discuss it if you don't know what type of literature they are. Are they a historical book or a documentary? Are they just moral stories put together? Maybe they're fiction or myth, and to some extent they have aspects of, you know, most of the things we just mentioned.

But there's a whole pile of genres that they could be. But we want to suggest that they are ancient biographies written in the Greco Roman style, and what ancient, these ancient Greco Roman biographies do is they have a little, few differences from our modern biographies, and we're first going to go over that before we get into a little more depth. In some ways they resemble our biographies, but some ways they're different.

So maybe before we get into that, I'm just going to give you example. There was a man named Plutarch, lived from 45 to 120 AD. He wrote many biographies, such as Julius Caesar, Augustus, Brutus, Alexander the Great. He actually wrote 48 biographies that they still have in existence today. So, and then there are many others.

So we have a good representation of the type of writings and how they worked.

And from these biographies, biographies, we see that the Gospels are written in that same style, but they do vary in how they compare to modern biographies. They, they have several key differences, and. But I think when we go through these differences, it'll help us understand how the Gospels relate to one another and how they help clear up some of these seemingly inconsistencies.

So the first thing ancient biographies did is they only wrote about dead people. You would never have a biography that was written about a live person like you do nowadays. A lot of times people write biographies, autobiographies when they're still alive. That would not happen. You'd be dead.

But again, this is probably one of the biggest difference of the Gospels to ancient biographies, because Jesus was Dead, but he was alive when these Gospels were written.

The second thing is ancient biographies primarily focused on the public life of the individual. They really spent very little time delving into their private or personal life, very little on their childhood, and we know this even when we look at the Gospels, we see a lot about how Jesus, when he taught, he preached, he was with others, but the weed really doesn't spend a lot of time telling us

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what his inner thoughts were, what his feelings were. There is a few examples of that, but it's not the main point of the biography.

Ancient biographies also in some ways would make the main character almost one dimensional. They would really hone in on one aspect of the individual. For if it was a king, how he became a king, if he was a villain, what made him a villain, and every aspect of that they didn't, wouldn't spend time what led to that point in his life or how they got there. But that was the focus of it was very one sided.

And we see that to some degree even in the Gospels. You know, we see how Jesus is resolute, how he is focused on the cross, how he is a, the holy man that has one mission, and we see that even in Luke, right when he's 12, 12 years of age, he's already talking about how can I be about my father's business.

And we kind of talked a little bit about this, that the characters are static. We don't, modern biographies spend a lot of time talking about how people have changed their, their in their character or change their thinking or and so forth. But we see that again, as I mentioned, Jesus is very static. There is no changing right from the time he is born to the time of his death. He has one mission in this world.

There is no div. Deviation from that.

But this is probably the thing that makes it the biggest difference as is that ancient biographies had freedom to change or arrange events based on topic and not on time or chronology, and I think this is a very important thing to understand. They were more interested in, in telling a theme than they necessarily were. If it was chronology chronologically in order. Again, they weren't going to just do it willy nilly, but they had to do it for a specific purpose.

And we'll give you example of that if we look at the book of John, the second chapter in verses 13 through 22 and in John it talks about in these verses. I'm not going to read them all there, but it's if you remember, he comes to the temple, his Passover, he comes to the Temple, and he cleanses the temple, drives out the money changers and so forth.

And then the continues on. After he's cleansed the temple, he's talking with the people, and Jesus says in verse 19, destroy the temple, and in three days I will raise it up, and the people say to him, it took 46 years to build. How are you going to raise it up in three days?

But Jesus said to them, but Jesus was speaking to them about his body, that his temple was his body. So we have this connection here about. He talks about, he cleanses the temple and then refers to himself as the temple. But in the other gospels, the cleansing of the temple is right at the end of his ministry. So was there two cleansings of the temple?

Was John making a mistake about where he put the cleansing of the temple? And if John was making a mistake, well, can we trust the book of John as being inspired?

I would like to suggest that John was following the, the way ancient biographies were written. He was talking about a theme. He was presenting Jesus in a way to make a thematic point about who Jesus was, and having him cleanse the temple at the beginning of his ministry in the book of John makes Jesus who he is throughout the rest of the book. So let's just explore this a little bit.

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Went further here. If we come back to the first chapter of John, verse 14, and we're just going to look at the very first part of that verse where it says, and the word became flesh and dwelt among us.

The word for dwelt, if you look in Greek, it's strong. 46, 37 is scana. Again, don't quote my Greek translations here. Pronunciation as I should say, which means to fix one's tabernacle or to tabernacle, and I think John in this picture is alluding, making us think back to the time when God tabernacled with his people in the wilderness.

Where was God's presence? It was found over the tabernacle, and then through time, as a tabernacle was transformed, they moved into building a temple. Again we see that God's presence was in the temple of. In the temple.

Sorry, God's presence was in the temple. So we have this picture of Jesus cleansing the temple right at the beginning of his ministry. He is saying in John's perspective that Jesus cleans, cleansing the temple. This temple that you now worship in is corrupted. God is no longer working through this temple, but now Jesus has become the new temple.

And he is the means by which God's spirit will be transmitted to Mankind, salvation can only come through the work, through the understanding and the belief of Jesus. So I think by thinking about it in this perspective and realizing that they have this ability to change things around a little bit, it gives such power to the Gospel of John because we now realize that through the rest of John, as you read it, you're reading it as Jesus is the means of salvation, because he is the new temple, the old temple is gone. The chief priests and all that don't believe them, believe in Jesus.

Okay, just a quick one. Another one real quickly is Matthew 24 and 25. We have the great prophecy of the end times where Luke divides it up into two chapters, 17 and 29. So Matthew combines two, two sermons of Jesus where Luke divides up. So you get, again, there's, there's context.

We won't go into the details of why, but so quite often in the writings of the Gospels, timelines don't necessarily match. But we shouldn't be concerned about that. That should actually spark us to think why instead of trying to harmonize them, we should wonder, why did that Gospel writer change that? What was he doing differently that he wrote it in a different matter? It should spark us to jump in and say he has a reason for that, not to harmonize it over and whitewash, cover it up.

So, and, and make it all together. I think that's. This is, you know, that was a. These were Jewish writers writing these books, and that was the mindset that Jewish writers had. They wanted you to dig.

They didn't want to make it easy for you. They wanted you to dig.

So let's, let's just now go through the rest of time kind of looking at these Gospels and some of the ways these writers were trying to frame in our mind their vision of how they saw Jesus. But before I'd like to do that, I just would like to recommend to the brethren, if you ever get a chance, these were a set of discourses, series of discourses given years ago by Brother Michael Nicora on the four Gospels. If you ever get a chance to listen to. To them, listen to them, because that was the first time I heard something along that line, and it sparked my thinking and, and I think he was really on to something at that with those discourses.

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Matthew, probably one of the easier books to get the theme to, and I also kind of attached it because that's where the theme text is in this year. So we'll start with Matthew and we'll see how far we get through going through some of these examples. Matthew's writing to a Jewish audience, and Matthew is really trying to present Jesus as the new Moses.

He is the one that fulfills the scripture. In Deuteronomy 18:15, Yahweh, your God will raise up a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers. You shall listen to him. This is how Matthew would like us to see Jesus. So let's kind of look at the life and examples in Jesus life, how they compare to Moses' life.

He was saved by the princess of Egypt. Jesus was saved by going into Egypt.

Moses left Egypt and went to the land of Midian till God was ready to use him. Jesus returned from Egypt and went to Nazareth till God was ready to use him.

Moses led God's firstborn through the water. Jesus was baptized in the water and God calls him his beloved Son, whom he is well pleased with. The Israelites wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. Jesus goes into the wilderness for 40 days.

There were three temptations in the wilderness from the Red Sea to Sinai. Jesus had three temptations, and what's interesting, roughly the time, from the time they left the Red Sea to the time they got to Mount Sinai was roughly 40 days, and just to recall the three temptations were the bitter waters at Marah they complained about food in the wilderness of the desert of sin, and at Rephaim there was no water to drink.

They're given the law at Mount Sinai, the ten Commandments, followed by many other laws. Jesus gives the Sermon on the Mount starts with the Beatitudes, followed by many other principles of Christian living.

And the last one that I found really interesting is there are five main sermons in the book of Matthew corresponding to the five main books of Moses, and what makes sets these five sermons apart is when Jesus finishes the sermon. It always says when Jesus had finished and then that, and then that's when the sermon ends, and the five sermons are the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5 through 7, the instruction to the disciples, Matthew 10 through 11:1, the kingdom parables, Matthew 13, the Sermon on the Church, Matthew 18 through 19:1 and the time of the end sermon, Matthew 24:26:1.

So let's just give an example why this is important to understand, and it's a simple example, but it just helps clarify things in as we look at this gospel, knowing that Jesus Matthew is writing about Jesus as the new Moses. So turn with me Matthew 8:28 when he had come to the other side into the region of Gardania Gardine Gardenis, two men who were Demon possessed met him as they were coming out of the tomb. They were so extremely violent that no one could pass by.

So in this verse, Jesus is, has. Remember he's come to this place and there's two demon possessed men that meet him there. But if we look to the Gospels of Mark and Luke, there's only one man that is demon possessed, and you go, well, why the difference? Why is there two in this and only one in there?

Or maybe there was only one that became a follower, maybe only one talked or so forth. But we don't really know that's not told why. But I'd like to suggest an answer to this. I'd like to suggest that

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Matthew is, is doing this because he is looking at Jesus as the new Moses, and the reason is based upon the law.

So to understand this, let's look at the background to this story a little bit. What's happening prior to this. They are, they are on the ship, on the sea, on the Sea of Galilee. They're, they're going across. Jesus is asleep in the boat and he's sound asleep.

And all of a sudden this big storm comes up, and the apostles, they're afraid and they cry out, save us Lord, and Jesus awakes and he calms the sea, and do you remember what the disciples said after he calms the sea? They asked the question, what kind of man is this that the winds and seas obey him?

And that's where the story ends. We're left hanging. Matthew leaves us hanging. Well, all the gospels do. They give the same story, but they leave us hanging.

But then you come to the next verse. They get off the boat, they meet these possessed men, and what did the possessed men say to them? What do you want with us, O Son of God? Here you have the answer to the question that was asked by the disciples.

But they answered by an unlikely source. They're answered by demons, demon possessed men. So we ask the question, why Does Matthew have two and Mark and Luke only have one? I think the answer is found in Deuteronomy 19:15, which says a single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong rung in connection with an offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witness, two or three witnesses shall a charge be established.

Well, I think Matthew is making sure he had two witnesses to prove his point. Luke and Mark are not being written from the same perspective. They're not worried about having two witnesses. So Matthew is making sure that the law is being fulfilled when he's Proving Jesus is the son of man, the son of God. I should say.

The second point I want to look about Matthew is just real quickly here. Matthew also makes a connection to him as the, from the line of math line of David, and it's one of those that Matthew takes great liberty in doing this. He says there's 14 generations from Abraham to David, 14 generations David to Babylon, 14 generations Babylon to Jesus. But if you go back in the Old Testament, you'll actually find there are more generations than this.

And it doesn't quite line up. But why does Matthew insist on putting 14 generations? And I think this is a mindset of Jewish writing that we, we have to. We are so worried in our world, we're so technical. We have the, the Roman mindset or the, the set that everything has to be a plus a 1 plus 1 plus 1.

But to the Jews, my father might be my great grandfather. As long as it's somebody in your lineage, they could be called your father. So they didn't necessarily. If somebody wasn't important within the lineage, they might skip them, and there's an examp in 1st Kings 15, 3 with one of the kings who is quite a few generations down from David.

They call him the son of David. But he didn't walk in David's way because David was a faithful man. This one wasn't. So he didn't walk in David's way, even though David was not his father, he would have been his great, great grandfather. So here Matthew picks up on this.

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He's. He really emphasizes the 14. But why 14? I'd like to suggest the name of David. The name of David in Hebrew is Dalit.

Vav. Dalit, and if you take the numeric value of these letters, Dalit is 4, Vav is 6 and Dallas is 4. The number is 14. It comes out too.

So 14 generation. So if you were a Hebrew reading this and you know that David is the, the one who has promised to have the Messiah come through his line and his number is 14, what greater evidence do you have than three 14s in a row? I, I thought that was kind of a really interesting example there. So. But Matthew continues on this theme also because he talks about the kingdom so much.

The kingdom of heaven is used 32 times. The kingdom of God is 50 times even. Who has one whole sermon on the parables of the kingdom. Let's see what time we got. Oh yeah, like to turn to the Gospel of Mark in comparison to the Gospel of Matthew and just want to look at this one.

Because it's written from a completely different perspective. Mark generally understood to have been written to the church of Rome, even from the earliest stages of the church. Matthew or Mark was written from the, to the church of Rome, and there's internal evidence and we're going to actually look at this, some of this internal evidence on this. A lot of people say Mark was the first Gospel.

I don't think so myself. I kind of tend to think Matthew was the first. There's good evidence in early church history that Matthew might even been written in Hebrew, and I think that would, would lead to that Mark. A lot of people say, scholars will say why it was the first because it's the shortest, it has the least on the resurrection and so forth.

But I don't think it's because of that, because I think it's the style that Mark is writing in and who he's writing it to. So let's just kind of take a little bit of look at that. Rome would have been their way of thinking, would have been much more similar to ours. If you ever read anything about Jewish literature and the way they talk, their language is very flowery, very colorful, lots of pictorials. They don't like to get to the point right off.

They want to lead you to the. They want you to dig in to study. They have hidden meanings in all this. Lots of word plays, pictures, chiasms and all these things are all into there. The Roman Church, on the other hand, was much like we are.

Just tell us what we need to know, get to the point, be very quick and just move on, and that is the style that Mark is written on. If you look at Mark, it's all about action.

He's always doing something. Sentences are short, there's no long speeches. It's very quick, quick, quick all the way through the other internal evidence. It's really kind of one of the things that's kind of neat, and I remember brother Carl Hagensek was the first person ever I ever heard that talk about that and where Simon is carrying the cross for Jesus and remember he's the father of Alexander and Rufus.

Well, why mention why none of the other gospels mention this. But if you look at the letter to the church of Romans in the greetings I forgot to mark down, I think it's Alexander is mentioned. Is it Alexander or Rufus? One of the two are mentioned as being part of the church. So it would be a nice nod to their father because of what he did.

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Now let's make some interesting comparisons between the book of Mark and how some of the aspects of what a Roman emperor would be like. So let's just start by reading Mark 11:15.

And we see here how Mark is talking about the true Gospel, the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, saying, the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel. So we got this beautiful opening sentence to the, to the Gospel of Jesus. Now listen to this. This is really, I find kind of fascinating.

This is how the Gospel of Augustus, the emperor of Rome, begins. The birthday of Augustus has been the whole world, the beginning of the gospel concerning him, the most divine Caesar we should consider equal to the beginning of all things. For when everything has fallen into disorder and tending toward disillusion, he restored it once more and gave the whole world a new aura. Caesar, the common good, fortunate one, the beginning of life and vitality. The cities unanimously adopt the birthday of the divine Caesar as the new beginning of the year.

Whereas the providence which has regulated our whole existence has brought our life to a climax of perfection in giving us the emperor Augustus, who, being sent to us and our descendant as savior, has put an end to war and has set all things in order, and having become God manifest, Caesar has fulfilled all the hopes of earlier times. It's interesting how in some respects the Gospel of Mark is picking up on this greeting, that he is now emphasizing that not the gospel of the Caesar that is important to know, it's the Gospel of Christ is the real reason by which you're going to gain life, and you can see that Mark begins to play upon this, and through the rest of the Gospel, he is showing that Jesus is the true king.

And he is giving Jesus's resume of why he should be king. Through the rest of the Gospel, he is showing that Jesus was the perfect servant of God. He humbly but with great resolve carried out the will of God to the complete end that he needed to do, as opposed to the emperor like Augustus, whose right to rule came from his military might, his power, his political power, that he might wield. The contrast is being set there. Mark is right from the beginning of his gospel, contrasting Jesus with the kings of this earth, that he is the true and rightful king, the one that God has sent that will set up the true kingdom.

And this connection continues on right to the end of the gospel, where Mark actually has this interesting comparison where he compares Jesus's death to the Caesar's coronation, and first time I came across this, it was kind of like accidentally came across as doing a memorial Study one time and looking at stuff, and then somewhere they were talking about the death of Jesus, and I like, oh, this is really interesting. But anyway, that's a side point anyway.

So he's comparing the death of Jesus to a coronation of an. Of emperor, and when this is found in Mark 15:16, 16 through 33, he basically follows the same order through that. That coronation. So let's, let's compare here.

So, sorry, that. That again is mark 6, 15, 16, 33. So it starts off in the Romans, the. In the orange will be the Roman side, in the green will be Mark's Gospel. So it starts off, the Praetorian guard gathers to hail Caesar as Lord and God.

As in Mark 15:16 it says. So the soldiers led him away to the palace and called together the whole cohort.

Then at the to on the Caesar they would place royal robes, a wreath crown and a scepter.

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Excuse me. Royal robes of purple were placed on the Caesar. A crown and a scepter was placed in his hand, and in Mark 15:17, 18, we see they put a purple cloak on him, and after weaving a crown, a crown of thorns, they placed it on him and they began to greet him.

Hail, King of Jews.

Then they would lead the Caesar through a procession lined with incense altars. Mark 15:20, and when they mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put on clothes on him, and they led him out so that he could be crucified.

And then you have the Caesar is followed by a sacrifice. In Nero's case it was a bull, and they carried the instrument of death. So you have Jesus walking, and they force Simon the Cyrene to carry the cross behind him.

Mark 15:21.

They arrived at Capatine, Capitoline, Capitoline Hill. Caesar was offered wine mixed with myrrh, but he refused it, pouring it out, and Mark says, and they brought him to the place called Golgotha, which is the place of the skull, and they attempted to give him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it, and then a side point here, interesting fact is, capital Capitoline hill in Rome is the place to be the ancient site where the head of Romulus is supposed to have been found.

So it is called. It's the. The hill with the head of Romulus, and as we know, Golgotha is translated the place of the skull.

A bull is killed. Caesar randomly pronounces death or life on the hosts of prisoners, demonstrating that he has the power of life and Jesus. There they crucified Jesus, divide his clothes, they cast lots for. Oh, man, I can't read here, and they crucified him and divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots for them to see who should take what.

And then we go on to the next one. Here, the. The emperor ascends to the temple with the high priest on his right and the commander on his left, and with Jesus were crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left.

They hail him, Lord and God, and the people proclaim, or people sing his praises, and with Jesus, they hail him, King of the Israel and mock him, you know, basically. But it's the same process there, and then finally, they wait for a sign from heaven.

And according to history, at Nero's coronation, there was an eclipse, and in the sixth hour, in Mark 15:33, we see in the sixth hour, darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour. So you have this, this general outline that Mark is wanting you to see. That we, we start off that this is the gospel of the true king. I give you the resume by which we see his actions.

And he does everything that is according to God's will, and now at his death, because he has laid down his life, because we understand that only in his death can all this be accomplished by laying his life down in. In the ransom, we have him proclaimed and coronated as the true king of the universe, and in Mark 15:34, we see who is the first to recognize that he is the true son of God. It is the Roman centurion.

And I think that's just another nod to why it was written to the Roman church. So we see Mark ends this Gospel of Mark, and then it ends in the most peculiar way. Jesus is resurrected, and then

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there's no appearances recorded in Mark, and you sometimes wonder why is that.

But I think the point that Mark is trying to say, I don't need to give you appearances. We've already proven that Jesus is the true king. The question is, now that you know he's raised from the dead, what are you going to do about it? This is a call to action. He's saying, Jesus is king and Lord.

What is your response now? Are you going to hide in fear, or are you going to go out and proclaim this message?

And so I think when we look at this. So as we look at these gospels, and I didn't really touch much on Luke, a little bit on John, but you understand, you start to see that these gospels are written from different perspectives, and that's why we have four Gospels because they're telling a different aspect of Jesus's life. They're talking to different audiences, and I think when we're studying them, we want to try keep this in the back of our mind.

It helps us to see why they said what they said, what they did, what they did, and why. Sometimes there is differences in the timeline or changes in how things are put together, because they're trying to tell us aspects of Jesus life and who he was and why he was doing those things that are particular to that Gospel. So I think it's important in my mind, I think when we try to harmonize the Gospels, we lose this. We should be comparing the Gospels and seeing that they are different and embracing that difference so that we can truly understand who Jesus is, and I hope that this has sparked a bit of thought in your mind as you're reading the Gospels, that it'll cause you to just dig a little bit deeper into them and just don't think of them as just straight stories, but think of them as God's revelation of Jesus in four different ways.

And Lord bless you in your studies of the Gospels. Because unless we know who Jesus was, how can we be like him? How can we emulate him? How can we be a copy if we don't understand who he is? So Lord bless you in that.