

# How to read the Gospels

## Introduction:

### A. There are three ways in which people read the gospels

<b>Its historical significance</b> What is the significance of this event in history?	<b>Its literary significance</b> What is the meaning of this detail in this gospel's story line?	<b>Its existential significance</b> How does this text affect me now?
<b>Historical</b>	<b>Literary</b>	<b>Devotional</b>

We want to be sensitive to what each of these approaches has to offer.

## Its literary significance

### B. Each gospel has a unique theme, emphasis, and style.

1. The completion of the Old Testament. Lk.24:27 *“And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures”*
2. The foundation of the New Testament. Eph.2:20 *“having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone,”*
3. They make up 46% of the New Testament.
4. They are thematic portraits (not biographies or histories) of Jesus life. Note that only about 50 days of Jesus' ministry are touched upon in the combined Gospels.
5. Each gospel has its own unique purpose and design.

	<b>MATTHEW</b>	<b>MARK</b>	<b>LUKE</b>	<b>JOHN</b>
<b>Portraits of Jesus</b>	The Prophesied King	The Obedient Servant	The Perfect Man	The Divine Son
<b>Prominent words</b>	“fulfilled”	“straightway”	“Son of man”	“believe”
<b>Cultures of the original readers</b>	Jews (Jesus, Son of Abraham)	Romans (Action: no genealogy)	Greeks (Jesus, Son of Adam)	Church (Jesus, Son of God)
<b>Outlook and style of the writers</b>	Teaching	Sermon	Literature	Theology
<b>Outstanding sections</b>	Sermons	Miracles	Parables	Doctrines
<b>Prominent ideas</b>	Law	Power	Grace	Glory
<b>Broad division</b>	“Synoptic Gospels” – stressing the			“Fourth Gospel” –

humanity of Christ from the outward, earthly side.

stressing the deity of Christ from the inward, heavenly side.

- 6. The **SYNOPTIC** (seeing together) Gospels (Matthew, Mark & Luke) emphasize the human/earthly aspects of Jesus. **JOHN** on the other hand emphasizes the divine/heavenly aspect of Jesus.
- 7. Matthew’s distinctives suggest that it is written for a **Jewish Christian** audience.
  - a. Fulfillment of Old Testament scriptures emphasized.
  - b. The Law is often mentioned.
  - c. The genealogy of Jesus goes back to Abraham.
  - d. Eschatology is important.
  - e. There is an emphasis upon symbolic numbers like #3,5,7,14 & etc.
  - f. Special inclusion of Gentiles is featured.
  - g. Matthew uses more O.T. quotations and allusions (130) than any other book.

8. The five fold literary structure of Matthew

*"It came to pass that when Jesus had finished these sayings" 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1*

- 1. **THE NEW LAW**  
Narrative 3-4  
Teaching 5-7
- 2. **CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP**  
Narrative 8:1-9:34  
Teaching 9:35-10:42
- 3. **THE MEANING OF THE KINGDOM**  
Narrative 11-12  
Teaching 13:1-52
- 4. **THE CHURCH**  
Narrative 13:53-17:27  
Teaching 18
- 5. **JUDGMENT**  
Narrative 19-22  
Teaching 23-25

*This is the story of Jesus and more importantly it is the story of the Kingdom of God. We read this gospel with ears to hear that story and appreciate our participation in the life and Kingdom of Messiah Jesus. The book of Matthew can be divided into four movements.*

- 1. *The King is revealed (ch.1:4:11)*
- 2. *The Kingdom is revealed (4:12- ch.10).*
- 3. *The King and His Kingdom are rejected (ch.11-27).*
- 4. *The King is raised (ch.28)*

*There are five discourses or sermons in Matthew (ch.5-7, 10, 13, 18, 24-25).*

<b>The King is Revealed</b>	<b>The Kingdom is Revealed</b>		<b>The King and His Kingdom are Rejected</b>			<b>The King is Raised</b>
	<b>In principle</b>	<b>In power</b>	<b>Reasons for</b>	<b>Recourse of</b>	<b>Results of</b>	

**Its devotional significance**

- C. The Bible is the Word of God written in human language.** It is properly interpreted when we respect both the laws of the Spirit and the laws of human language.
- D. The laws of the Spirit.** Because the Bible is the Word of God we must be spiritually sensitive to God if we are to have “ears to hear.”

1. It is possible to read and not understand or receive the Word because of:

- **a rebellious spirit - Amos 8:11-12** “Behold, days are coming,’ declares the Lord God, ‘When I will send a famine on the land, not a famine for bread or a thirst for water, but rather for hearing the words of the Lord. And people will stagger from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east; **they will go to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, but they will not find it.**”

The context of Amos 8 indicates that because of disrespect and disregard for the will of God the revelation of God was removed.

- **a spirit that is thankless for what has been understood - Rom.1:21-23** “For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but **they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.** Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.”
- **a secular approach to the Scripture - II Pet.1:20-21** “But know this first of all **that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation,** for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.
- **a failure to be familiar with the ways of the Spirit of Christ - I Cor.1:10-16** “<sup>10</sup> For to us God revealed {them} through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. <sup>11</sup> For who among men knows the {thoughts} of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the {thoughts} of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. <sup>12</sup> **Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God,** <sup>13</sup> which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual {thoughts} with spiritual {words.} <sup>14</sup> But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. <sup>15</sup> But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no man. <sup>16</sup> *For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he should instruct Him?* But we have the mind of Christ.”

2. How does the Spirit reveal truth to us?

- a. The Spirit teaches as we search the Scripture.

**I Pet.1:10-12** “<sup>10</sup> As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that {would come} to you made careful search and inquiry, <sup>11</sup> seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. <sup>12</sup> **It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you,** in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven-- things into which angels long to look.”

1. The Spirit teaches through both the prophet’s writing and the preacher’s preaching.
2. The basic message of the New can be understood in terms of:

- a. The sufferings of Christ,
  - b. The glories to follow.
- b. The Spirit convicts the world and glorifies Christ.

**Jn.16:7-14** “7 But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper shall not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. 8 And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment; 9 concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; 10 and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you no longer behold Me; 11 and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged. 12 I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear {them} now. 13 **But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth;** for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. 14 He shall glorify Me; for He shall take of Mine, and shall disclose {it} to you.”

1. He is a gift to the believing community.
  2. The nature of the Spirit’s teaching ministry.
    - a. “convicting” - It is directed to the inner man.
    - b. “guiding” - It is comprehensive.
    - c. “glorifying” - It is centered in Christ.
    - d. “disclosing” - It is a ministry of clarifying not complicating.
- c. The Spirit will not contradict the text.
- Prov.30:5-6** “Every word of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. **Do not add to His words lest He reprove you, and you be proved a liar.**” I Cor.4:6 “Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that in us you might learn **not to exceed what is written**, in order that no one of you might become arrogant in behalf of one against the other.”
- d. The Spirit will enable us to see beyond the letter of the law.
- Jn.5:39-40** “You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and **it is these that bear witness of Me;** and you are unwilling to come to Me, that you may have life.”
- e. We can see things at different levels.
1. Three Greek words for sight in **Jn.20:1-10**
    - a. “and stooping and looking in, he **saw** the linen wrappings lying there; but he did not go in.” vs.5 “Saw” BLEPO means to see in a general (superficial) way.
    - b. “Simon Peter therefore also came, following him, and entered the tomb; and he **beheld** the linen wrappings lying there, and the face-cloth, which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself.” vs.6-7 “Beheld” THEOREO means to observe in an attentive way.
    - c. “Then entered in therefore the other disciple also, who had first come to the tomb, and he **saw**, and believed.” vs.8 “Saw” HORAO means to discern or to grasp the implications of.
  2. Three levels of understanding Scripture.
    - a. Occasional level - What did the text mean to the original author and readers.
    - b. Universal level - What is the timeless message of the text for our generation.

- c. Personal spiritual level - What is the Spirit teaching me through this text.  
Matt.16:17; Jn.14-16; I Cor.2:14; II Cor.4:3-4
- 3. Each level builds upon the previous level. It is our goal to be able to work with each level in interpreting the Bible.
- f. We must be willing to obey what we learn.  
**Jn.7:17** “If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from Myself.” Jn.8:47 “He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God.”
- g. We must meditate on the Scripture. **Ps.119:97-104**
- h. We must have a hunger to learn.  
**I Pet.2:2** “like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,”
- i. Spiritual maturity is an important factor in understanding God’s Word. **I Cor.2:14-3:3** “Spiritual”, “carnal”, and “babes” in Christ.

## It's historical significance

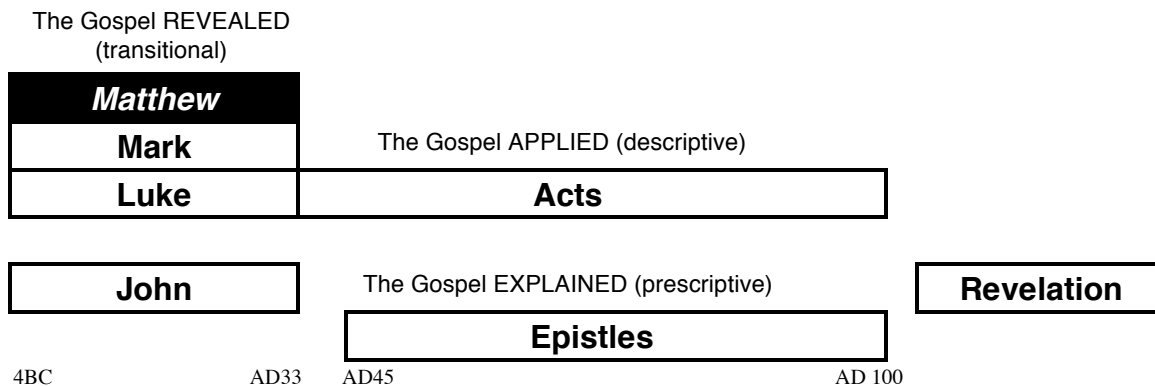
### E. The gospels are reliable accounts of the historical Jesus.

1. Ancient writers were not, on the whole, either fools or frauds. Given the turmoil and diversity of the first century of the church's existence, it is remarkable that there is such harmony between the four gospel accounts.
2. The gospels give us an authentic picture of life in Palestine at the time of which they purport to write.
3. Hebrew rabbis took great pains to ensure that their sayings were accurately remembered and passed on to their followers.
4. The gospel documents are dated early enough so that if they were inaccurate there would have been eye witnesses to dispute their authority.
5. If they were propaganda documents created by the early church they seem to be wholly inadequate.
6. While the Gospels do share some common characteristics of ancient Greco-Roman biographies, they also digress from any known pattern of literature and are therefore best understood as unique biographical accounts of Jesus' life and teaching.

### F. The redemptive historical context of the gospels will help us understand them.

1. **"NEW TESTAMENT"** literally means the "New Covenant" in contrast to the "Old Covenant" or Old Testament.
2. The covenant theme in the Old Testament provides a rich background for the New Testament.
  - a. **GOD'S COVENANT THROUGH ABRAHAM** promised a blessing to the world through Israel. This PROMISE is the backbone for much of the Old & New Testament.
  - b. **GOD'S COVENANT THROUGH MOSES** is spoken of as "the Law" or the "old covenant" and served as a temporary tutor preparing Israel for the New Covenant.
  - c. **GOD'S COVENANT THROUGH JESUS** is called THE NEW COVENANT and is pictured as the fulfillment (in part) of the PROMISE made to Abraham.
  - d. **Respect the relationship of "Jesus' teaching" as it relates to the Old and New Covenants.**
    1. **Matt. 6:14-15** *"For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions."*  
(compare **Eph. 4:32** *"And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you."*)
    2. **Matt. 5:17** *"Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill."* (What does "fulfill" mean in this text?)  
(compare **II Cor. 3:6** *"... who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."*)
3. The documents of the New Testament bear directly upon the **instrument** (Jesus) and **recipients** (the church) of the NEW COVENANT.

4. The early church told the story of Jesus out of a context of its significance to the spiritual life of the church. The church “remembered” (Lk.22:19; I Cor.11:24-25) the story of Jesus as the Jews had remembered the Exodus. This does not mean that the Gospels are not historically accurate but it does mean that the authors were selective in what they recorded and often shaped the story to support the central significance of God’s purpose in Christ.
5. The historical scope of the New Testament.



**G. Which of the gospel accounts is correct?** A careful study of the Gospels will raise some important questions that need to be addressed.

1. How are we to understand the similarities and differences in the way the gospels tell the story of Jesus?.
  - a. “Common quotations” – Some details are virtually identical so as to suggest that they came from a common source.
  - b. “Differing details” - Some times the gospels report the same event in differing ways.

**Matthew 19:16-17**

“Then someone came to him and said, ‘Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?’ And he said to him, ‘**Why do you ask me about what is good?** There is only one who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments. . . .’

**Mark 10:17-18**

“As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, ‘God Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ Jesus said to him, ‘**Why do you call me good?** No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments . . .’

**Mark 16:2-5**

...very early in the morning on the first day of the week they went to the tomb just as the sun was rising. They had been saying to one another ‘Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?’ But when they looked they could see that the stone – which was very big – had already been rolled back. On entering the tomb they saw **a young man in a white robe seated at the**

**Luke 24:1-4**

On the first day of the week, at the first sign of dawn, they went to the tomb with the spices they had prepared. They found that the stone had been rolled away from the tomb, but on entering discovered that the body of the Lord Jesus was not there. As they stood there not knowing what to think, **two men in brilliant clothes suddenly appeared**

**Matthew 28:1-4**

...towards dawn on the first day of the week Mary of Magdala and the other Mary went to visit the sepulchre. And all at once there was a violent earthquake, for the **angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled away the stone and sat on it.** His face was like lightning, his

**right-hand side.**

**at their side...**

robe white as snow...

2. How are we to understand the way the gospels quote and use the Old Testament?
  - a. “Misquotes” - The gospel’s quotations often do not match the OT text.
    - 1) **Matt. 15:7-9 (Isa. 29:13)** “You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophecy of you, saying, ‘This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me. **But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men.’**”
 

**Isa. 29:13** in the OT - “Then the Lord said, ‘Because this people draw near with their words and honor Me with their lip service, but they remove their hearts far from Me, **and their reverence for Me consists of traditions learned by rote,’**”
    - 2) **Matt. 12:21 (Isa. 42:4)** “And in His name the Gentiles will hope.”
 

**Isa. 42:4** “And the coastlands will wait expectantly for His law.”
    - 3) **Matt. 2:6 (Micah 5:2)** “And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, **are by no means least** among the leaders of Judah; for out of you shall come forth a Ruler, who will shepherd My people Israel.”
 

**Micah 5:2** in the OT - “But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, **too little to be** among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel.”
  - b. “Misaddress” - Some times the gospels ascribe a quote to the wrong OT text.
    - 1) **Matt. 27:9 (Zech. 11:12-13)** “Then that which was **spoken through Jeremiah the prophet** was fulfilled, saying, ‘And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of the one whose price had been set by the sons of Israel; and they gave them for the Potter’s Field, as the Lord directed me.’”
    - 2) **Mk. 1:2-3 (Mal. 3:1)** “As it is **written in Isaiah the prophet**, ‘Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way; the voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘make ready the way of the Lord, make His paths straight.’ ’ ” (Note that Matthew corrects this “mistake” — Matt. 3:3.)

#### **H. The synoptic problem has received a lot of attention but no clear resolution.**

1. **Stated:** How do we explain the differences and similarities between Matthew, Mark, and Luke? Were they in any way dependent upon one another or common sources? If so, how?
2. **The Traditional view:**
  - a. The Gospels appear in the order in which they were probably written, thought this is insignificant.
  - b. The gospels are basically parallel accounts representing the work of the authors under the influence of the Holy Spirit, their own personal witness and any literary or oral fragments that may have been at their disposal. Lk. 1:1-4; Acts 20:35; Jn. 16:13; 14:26.
  - c. The differing details in the gospel accounts are seen not as contradictions. They are to be explained as distinctive in style, viewpoint, or commentary on the part of the individual writers.
3. Traditional presuppositions:
  - a. The record is legitimate and authentic as it claims to be.



- b. Ancient traditions surrounding the origin of these records agree with the internal evidence of the gospels themselves and are probably valid.
  - c. The New Testament Church recognized that these records were authoritative and inspired soon after their circulation.
  - d. Reason must be subject to revelation at some point. Deut. 29:29; Prov. 25:2
4. The presuppositions of radical higher critical study:
- a. There has got to be a historical, sociological, literary or scientific explanation for everything.
  - b. Supernatural inspiration is not an alternative.
  - c. Mark is short and simple, therefore it must be prior to and expanded by Matthew and Luke.
  - d. Gospels are the products of human creativity and or ancient culture.
5. **General conclusions drawn by historical critics.**
- a. There is a great difference between the Jesus of history (of whom we know very little because we can't trust the gospel records) and the Christ of the early church (who is the creation of Paul's faith later to be amended by Constantine and the church Councils).

<b>Jesus of history</b> (a mystery)	<b>The Gospels</b> (written to support the theology of Paul through a fanciful depiction of the Jesus of history)	<b>Christ of the church</b> ("Paul's" - the early church's faith)
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- b. The Gospels are primarily a record of the beliefs of the early church about Jesus, rather than any sort of account of Jesus as he actually was. They were written as ancient hero biographies to provide a foundation for Paul's theology.
- c. The criteria used to discern the true sayings and deeds of Jesus is based on the following assumptions.
  - 1. If authentic, the words ascribed to Jesus must be distinct from Judaism and or the early church's unique teachings.
    - a) Anything in Jesus' teaching that can be paralleled in either the teaching of Judaism or the theology of the early church is of doubtful authenticity according to this rule.
    - b) **Response:** Are we to assume that Jesus spoke in a cultural vacuum with no spiritual context? And are we to also assume that there was no continuity between Jesus and the early church? And how can we be so sure of what may have been a part of early Jewish tradition (of which we know very little)?
  - 2. If authentic, the words ascribed to Jesus must be recorded in more than one unrelated source.
    - a) If a saying of Jesus is found in say Mark and also in Q (the hypothetical unknown source used by Matthew and Luke but not by Mark) it is to be regarded as more authentic than if it occurs in but one source.
    - b) **Response:** It has become apparent that the formation and relationship between the gospels is very complex. We can not assume that there were but four sources (Mark, Q, M,&L).

3. If authentic, the words ascribed to Jesus must be consistent with the historical and cultural setting of his day.
- d. It is assumed that the early church viewed the gift of prophecy as “the word of Jesus” just as much as the oral tradition of what Jesus said in the flesh. This led to justification for insertions into the gospel accounts.
  1. **Response:** There is little evidence that the early church regarded the gift of prophecy in this way. The foundation of the church came from the teaching of the twelve not the on going prophetic voice of the church.
  2. **Response:** Paul demonstrates in I Cor.7 a sensitivity to the distinction between his teaching and that of Jesus.
- e. It is assumed that Christianity as we know it, was established as a religion by Constantine who needed it for political reasons.
  1. It is claimed that neither the Gospels nor Paul regarded Jesus as God.
  2. Jesus was deified at the Council of Nicaea at 325AD through the influence of Emperor Constantine (who was theologically illiterate) in the same way that Mary was pronounced “Mother of God” and without sin in 431AD at the Council of Ephesus.
  3. **Response:** The early church father’s spoke of the divinity of Christ long before the 4<sup>th</sup> century.

<b>Higher critical approaches</b>	<b>Source Criticism</b>	<b>Form Criticism</b>	<b>Redaction Criticism</b>	<b>Deconstructive Criticism</b>
<b><i>Questions addressed by each approach</i></b>	How were various sources used in the compositions?	How were elements of the story used in the early church?	How do the human authors tell the story?	How does the text impact us today?

## How to read the gospels

### A. There are three ways in which people read the gospels

<b>Its historical significance</b> <i>What is the significance of this event in history?</i>	<b>Its literary significance</b> <i>What is the meaning of this detail in this gospel's story line?</i>	<b>Its existential significance</b> <i>How does this text effect me now?</i>
<b>Historical</b>	<b>Literary</b>	<b>Devotional</b>

### B. Each gospel has a unique theme, emphasis, and style.

	<b>MATTHEW</b>	<b>MARK</b>	<b>LUKE</b>	<b>JOHN</b>
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<i>Cultures of the original readers</i>	<b>Jews (Jesus, Son of Abraham)</b>	Romans (Action: no genealogy)	Greeks (Jesus, Son of Adam)	Church (Jesus, Son of God)
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**C. The gospels are reliable accounts of the historical Jesus.**

1. Ancient writers were not fools or frauds.
2. The gospels give us an authentic picture of life in Palestine at the time.
3. Hebrew rabbis took great pains.
4. The gospel documents are dated early.
5. If they were propaganda documents -
6. The Gospels digress from any known pattern of literature.

**D. The theological context of the gospels will help us understand some of the difficult passages.**

<b>Abrahamic covenant</b> <i>“The Promise”</i>	<b>Mosaic covenant</b> <i>“The Law”</i>	<b>New covenant</b> <i>“The New Testament”</i>
<b>Old Testament &amp; Gospels</b>		<b>Acts &amp; Epistles</b>
Matt. 6:14-15 “For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.”		Eph. 4:32 “And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”)
Matt. 5:17 “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to		II Cor. 3:6 “... who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit; for the

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## How are we to understand the similarities and differences in the way the gospels tell the story of Jesus?

### Matthew 19:16-17

“Then someone came to him and said, ‘Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?’ And he said to him, **‘Why do you ask me about what is good?’** There is only one who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments. . . .”

### Mark 10:17-18

“As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, ‘God Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ Jesus said to him, **‘Why do you call me good?’** No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments . . .”

### Mark 16:2-5

...very early in the morning on the first day of the week they went to the tomb just as the sun was rising. They had been saying to one another ‘Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?’ But when they looked they could see that the stone – which was very big – had already been rolled back. On entering the tomb they saw **a young man in a**

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## General conclusions drawn by historical critics.

<p><b><i>Jesus of history</i></b>  (a mystery)</p>	<p><b><i>The Gospels</i></b>  (written to support the theology of Paul through a fanciful depiction of the Jesus of history)</p>	<p><b><i>Christ of the church</i></b>  ("Paul's" - the early church's faith)</p>
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- The criteria used to discern the true sayings and deeds of Jesus is based on the following assumptions.
  1. If authentic, the words ascribed to Jesus must be distinct from Judaism and or the early church's unique teachings.
  2. If authentic, the words ascribed to Jesus must be recorded in more than one unrelated source.
  4. If authentic, the words ascribed to Jesus must be consistent with the historical and cultural setting of his day.
- It is assumed that the early church viewed the gift of prophecy as "the word of Jesus" just as much as the oral tradition of what Jesus said in the flesh. This led to justification for insertions into the gospel accounts.
- It is assumed that Christianity as we know it, was established as a religion by Constantine who needed it for political reasons.

# *Laws of the Spirit*

**A. *It is possible to read and not understand or receive the Word because of:***

**1) a rebellious spirit.**

**Amos 8:11-12** “Behold, days are coming,” declares the Lord God, “When I will send a famine on the land, not a famine for bread or a thirst for water, but rather for hearing the words of the Lord. And people will stagger from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east; **they will go to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, but they will not find it.**”

The context of Amos 8 indicates that because of disrespect and disregard for the will of God the revelation of God was removed.

**2) a spirit that is thankless for what has been understood.**

**Rom.1:21-23** “For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but **they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.** Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.”



### 3) a secular approach to the Scripture.

**II Pet.1:20-21** “But know this first of all **that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation**, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

### 4) a failure to be familiar with the ways of the Spirit of Christ.

**I Cor.1:10-16** “**10** For to us God revealed {them} through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. **11** For who among men knows the {thoughts} of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the {thoughts} of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. **12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God,** **13** which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual {thoughts} with spiritual {words.} **14** But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. **15** But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no man. **16** *For who has known the mind*

*of the Lord, that he should instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ.”*

## ***B. How does the Spirit reveal truth to us?***

### **a. The Spirit teaches as we search the Scripture.**

**I Pet.1:10-12** “<sup>10</sup> As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that {would come} to you made careful search and inquiry, <sup>11</sup> seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. <sup>12</sup> **It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you,** in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven-- things into which angels long to look.”

### **b. The Spirit convicts the world and glorifies Christ.**

**Jn.16:7-14** “<sup>7</sup> But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper shall not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. <sup>8</sup> And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment; <sup>9</sup> concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; <sup>10</sup> and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you no longer behold Me; <sup>11</sup> and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged. <sup>12</sup> I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear {them} now. <sup>13</sup> **But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth;** for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. <sup>14</sup>

He shall glorify Me; for He shall take of Mine, and shall disclose {it} to you.”

**c. The Spirit will not contradict the text.**

**Prov.30:5-6** “Every word of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. **Do not add to His words lest He reprove you, and you be proved a liar.**” **I Cor.4:6** “Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that in us you might learn **not to exceed what is written**, in order that no one of you might become arrogant in behalf of one against the other.”

**d. The Spirit will enable us to see beyond the letter.**

**Jn.5:39-40** “You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and **it is these that bear witness of Me**; and you are unwilling to come to Me, that you may have life.”

**e. We must be willing to obey what we learn.**

**Jn.7:17** “If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from Myself.” **Jn.8:47** “He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God.”

**f. We must meditate on the Scripture. Ps.119:97-104**

**g. We must have a hunger to learn.**



**I Pet.2:2** “like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,”

**h. Spiritual maturity is an important factor in understanding God’s Word. I Cor.2:14-3:3 “Spiritual”, “carnal”, and “babes” in Christ.**

**i. We can see things at different levels.**

### **1. Three Greek words for sight in Jn.20:1-10**

- a. “and stooping and looking in, he **saw** the linen wrappings lying there; but he did not go in.” vs.5 “Saw” **BLEPO** means to see in a general (superficial) way.
- b. “Simon Peter therefore also came, following him, and entered the tomb; and he **beheld** the linen wrappings lying there, and the face-cloth, which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself.” vs.6-7 “Beheld” **THEOREO** means to observe in an attentive way.
- c. “Then entered in therefore the other disciple also, who had first come to the tomb, and he **saw**, and believed.” vs.8 “Saw” **HORAO** means to discern or to grasp the implications of.

### **2. Three levels of understanding Scripture.**

- a. **Occasional level** - What did the text mean to the original author and readers.
- b. **Universal level** - What is the timeless message of the text for our generation.

c. **Personal spiritual level** - What is the Spirit teaching me through this text. Matt.16:17; Jn.14-16; I Cor.2:14; II Cor.4:3-4

**3. Each level builds upon the previous level. It is our goal to be able to work with each level in interpreting the Bible.**