

SESSION

2

CHAPTER

2

The Synoptic Gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke

QUICK REFERENCE LESSON TITLES AND OBJECTIVES

Lesson 2.1 The Gospel of Matthew

- Objective 2.1.1 Explain Matthew's purpose and the main way he fulfilled it.
- Objective 2.1.2 Identify and explain the five teaching segments or sermons of Matthew.
- Objective 2.1.3 Explain why Matthew emphasized the Kingdom. State three ways he stressed it.

Lesson 2.2 The Gospel of Mark

- Objective 2.2.1 Explain Mark's purpose and how he fulfilled it.
- Objective 2.2.2 Give two examples of how Mark helped Gentile readers.

Lesson 2.3 The Gospel of Luke

- Objective 2.3.1 Contrast the purposes of Matthew and Luke.
- Objective 2.3.2 Identify five things found only in Luke that emphasize his theme of Jesus, the Savior of all.

Lesson 2.4 Characteristics of the Synoptics

- Objective 2.4.1 Summarize and apply four reasons Jesus taught in parables.
- Objective 2.4.2 Define the kingdom of God, and explain its two phases.
- Objective 2.4.3 Explain why Jesus healed and did miracles.

Chapter Introduction

The Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—allow us to learn about Jesus Christ from three different points of view. Although different, Matthew, Mark, and Luke share many similarities; this is why they are grouped together. The gospel of John and the Synoptics together give us four portraits of Jesus that provide a more complete picture of Him than we

could ever have with just one book. Matthew emphasized that Jesus was a king, but Mark showed that He was a perfect servant. Luke showed Jesus as the Son of Man, but John emphasized that He was the Son of God. Help students learn to value and love all of the Gospels even as they learn to identify and understand their differences in purpose and presentation.

2.1



The Gospel of Matthew

Review with students. *Synoptic* means “seeing together.” We call Matthew, Mark, and Luke the *Synoptic Gospels* because they look at the ministry and teachings of Jesus from similar points of view. They tell similar stories about Jesus and present Him from a different perspective than does John.



Group Discussion: Which Gospel quotes the Old Testament the most? Why might this be so?

- *Matthew quotes Old Testament Scripture the most. This fits with his purpose in speaking to the Jews and demonstrating that Jesus is the Messiah, the King of the Jews, and the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.*



DISPLAY VISUAL 5

Use this visual to give students a broad overview of the differences in perspective of Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

The Synoptic Gospels

- Matthew wrote to a Jewish audience.
He emphasized that Jesus is the Messiah, King of the Jews.
- Mark wrote to a Roman audience.
He emphasized Jesus as the Servant of the Lord, busy working.
- Luke wrote to a Greek audience.
He emphasized that Jesus is the Son of Man, the perfect human.



Distribute Worksheet 2—Synoptic Overview. Be sure that Visual 5 is no longer visible to students. Challenge them to complete the chart for each Gospel as you review that particular book.



Group Discussion: In addition to highlighting Old Testament prophecies, Matthew wrote thirty-three times about the *kingdom of heaven*. Why did Matthew use this term rather than *kingdom of God* as the other Gospel writers did?

- *The Jews believed God’s name was so holy that they rarely spoke it. Because he was a Jew writing to Jewish readers, Matthew followed this pattern by usually avoiding using the word God.*

**DISPLAY VISUAL 6**

Use this visual as a brief review of Jesus' teachings as recorded in Matthew.

Five Teaching Segments in Matthew**1. Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5 to 7)**

Serves as a transition from Jesus' private life to His public ministry

2. Choosing and Sending of the Twelve (Matthew 10)

Follows ten miracles and precedes the rising conflict with the religious leaders

3. Eight Parables (Matthew 13)

Transition to Jesus' ministry in Galilee and growing conflict with the Jewish leaders

4. Teachings on Humility and Forgiveness (Matthew 18)

Marks Jesus' turn from Galilee to Judea

5. Teachings on the End Times (Matthew 24 and 25)

Precedes the Last Supper, Crucifixion, and Resurrection



Review with students. The Jews expected the kingdom of God to come to earth when the Messiah came. They thought the Messiah would overthrow the Roman oppressors and restore sovereignty to Israel. Although the prophets had predicted that the Messiah and God's kingdom would come to the earth, the Jews did not discern that the Kingdom would come in two phases: first, the Messiah coming to suffer (Isaiah 53), and then His returning to set up God's kingdom on earth. Because Matthew wrote to assure his Jewish readers that Jesus is the Messiah, his primary method of proving this was showing how Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament Scriptures.



Group Discussion: What are three ways Matthew stressed the kingdom of heaven?

- (1) Matthew showed that the Kingdom was near at hand and included many of Jesus' teachings about it. (2) He emphasized the righteous standards of the Kingdom and showed the Kingdom's present power over sin, sickness, demons, and even death. (3) He wrote about the future triumph of the Kingdom at the end of the age. He also included twelve of Jesus' parables about the Kingdom.

2.2

The Gospel of Mark

Group Discussion: What is the purpose and theme of Mark's Gospel?

- Mark portrayed Jesus as the servant of the Lord.



Review with students. Mark shows Jesus Christ in action. Unlike the other Synoptic Gospel writers, Mark gives no genealogy of Jesus, but we see Jesus as the servant busy doing His Father’s work. Forty-two times Mark describes Jesus as doing things “immediately.” Almost half of the Gospel of Mark deals with the death and resurrection of Jesus. In these ways, Mark portrayed Jesus as the Son who actively served His Father—even to the point of suffering and death. Ask volunteers to suggest ways Mark’s Gospel illustrates Jesus as the obedient servant of the Lord.



Group Discussion: What are two particular ways Mark helped his main audience, Roman Gentiles, to better understand the gospel message?

- *Mark explained many Jewish customs and specific words from the Aramaic language that would have been difficult for Gentiles to understand without explanation.*



DISPLAY VISUAL 7

Ask students to explain what each Aramaic word or Jewish custom means, as explained by Mark in his Gospel. If necessary, students may consult the references provided to find the answers. Discuss why Mark’s explanations would have been critical for his intended audience to fully understand his message and how they help those of us today who are far removed from the Jewish culture of Mark’s era.

Mark the Translator

- “Boanerges” (Mark 3:17)
- “Talitha kum!” (Mark 5:41)
- Washing of hands (Mark 7:2–4)
- “Corban” (Mark 7:11)
- “Ephphatha” (Mark 7:34)
- “Golgotha” (Mark 15:22)
- “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?” (Mark 15:34)
- “Preparation Day” (Mark 15:42)

2.3

The Gospel of Luke



Group Discussion: Matthew, a Jew writing to Jews, wrote to prove that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah who fulfilled Old Testament prophecies. But Luke was a Greek writing to other Greeks. Luke’s main theme and purpose reflect that. Luke presents Jesus as the Savior of whom?

- *Jesus is the Savior of all: showing this is Luke’s primary purpose.*



Review with students. Luke shows that Jesus came to be the Savior of all people. Assign one or more of the following Bible references to each student, and ask them to identify what sort of person it shows Jesus coming to save. Then ask students to consider how to apply this truth to

their own lives. Is God asking you to tell someone who seems beyond the reach of the gospel that Jesus came to save him or her?

- Samaritans: Luke 9:51–55; 10:30–37; 17:11–19
- Gentiles: Luke 2:11, 31–32, 38; 4:25–27; 7:9; 10:1; 24:47
- Jews: Luke 1:33; 2:10, 31–32; 19:9–10
- Publicans, sinners, and society’s castoffs: Luke 3:12; 5:27–32; 7:37–50; 19:2–10; 23:43
- Respected people: Luke 7:36; 11:37; 14:1
- The poor: Luke 1:53; 2:7; 6:20; 7:22; 14:21
- The rich: Luke 14:2; 23:50
- Women and men: Luke 7:36–50; 19:1–10



DISPLAY VISUAL 8

Review with students two unique purposes Luke accomplished in writing his Gospel.

Two Purposes in Luke

1. To emphasize that Jesus came “to seek and save what was lost” (Luke 19:10)—that salvation was for all
2. To emphasize that Jesus was the perfect Man



Review with students. After reviewing the first point in Visual 8, review some places we can see Luke’s emphasis on Jesus as the universal Savior. Have volunteers read aloud the following passages and summarize how each reflects Luke’s emphasis on salvation for *all* who would believe in Jesus.

- **Luke 1:31** Jesus’ name means “Savior.”
- **Luke 2:10–11** The angels told the shepherds good news for all the people.
- **Luke 2:30–32** Simeon praised God for the child, Jesus, calling Him a light to the Gentiles and to Israel.
- **Luke 19:10** Jesus said He had come to seek and to save what was lost.



Group Discussion: After discussing the second point in Visual 8, ask students this question: knowing that the highest goal of educated Greeks was to find the ideal or perfect person, why do you think it was imperative for Luke to show Jesus as the perfect man?

- *Individual responses will vary. Encourage thoughtful discussion. Luke showed Jesus as the answer the Greeks were seeking.*

2.4

Characteristics of the Synoptics



Group Discussion: Name six events that found in all three Synoptic Gospels?

- (1) John's announcement of the Savior; (2) Jesus' baptism; (3) His temptation; (4) His transfiguration; (5) His trial, death, and burial; and (6) His resurrection.



DISPLAY VISUAL 9

Discuss the positive reasons Jesus frequently used parables. Expound on each point so your students fully understand what is meant.

Why Did Jesus Teach in Parables?

1. Parables were safe. Jesus' enemies could not easily attack Him for telling a story.
2. Parables illustrate and preserve truth and are easily remembered.
3. Jesus used parables to hide new truth from unfaithful people.
4. Jesus used parables to teach about the kingdom of God.



Review with students. Jesus taught much about the kingdom of God or kingdom of heaven. Review the two phases or time periods of God's kingdom as revealed through Christ's teaching and the prophecies of the Old Testament.

First is the invisible phase, referring to God's spiritual rule. Ask a student to read aloud Luke 17:20–21 to review some of the attributes of the Kingdom in this phase.

Second will come the visible phase of the Kingdom. Ask a student to read aloud Matthew 25:31–32 to review what we will see at this phase. You could have students read Isaiah 11:1–10 and Malachi 4:1–3 for further revelation about this phase of the Kingdom.



Group Discussion: According to the text, what was the primary purpose of Jesus' miracles? Of what are they the best evidence?

- Jesus' miracles showed that He was the Messiah, God's servant, and our Savior. Physical miracles proved that Jesus has power to meet people's spiritual needs.



While Jesus' signs, wonders, and miracles validated His ministry, He was motivated by tender compassion to heal and restore the lives of the people He encountered. His miracles were not a sideshow to attract the curious; rather, they flowed out of His desire to bring hope and life to people who lived in despair. Encourage students who need Christ's compassion to effect a miracle in their lives to come forward for prayer. Close with prayer, asking God to meet students' needs and thanking Him for providing the Gospels so that we might know Him and experience salvation and fullness of life in Him.

LOGOS DIGITAL LIBRARY RESEARCH SUGGESTIONS

R.B. Zuck, *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, electronic ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 18–22. See “A Theology of Matthew” for a discussion of the focus of Matthew in recounting the ministry of Jesus.

D. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 4th rev. ed., The Master Reference Collection (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 102–108. See “Luke’s Gospel” for background information regarding the third Gospel.

SESSION

3

CHAPTER

3

The Gospel of John

QUICK REFERENCE LESSON TITLES AND OBJECTIVES

Lesson 3.1 Understanding John

Objective 3.1.1 Explain why John omitted many things that are in the Synoptics.

Objective 3.1.2 Analyze the words *signs*, *believe*, and *life* in relation to John's purpose.

Lesson 3.2 The Structure of John

Objective 3.2.1 Analyze the introduction and conclusion of John.

Lesson 3.3 The Teachings of Jesus in John

Objective 3.3.1 Analyze the relationship between the signs and teachings in John 5, 6, 9, and 11.

Objective 3.3.2 Identify the seven "I am" statements in John.

Objective 3.3.3 Explain three lessons from people who talked with Jesus.

Chapter Introduction

The four Gospels work together to give us a thorough understanding of Jesus—who He is, what He did, and what He taught. But it is quickly apparent that John's Gospel is different from the three Synoptics. It enriches our lives in unique ways as it builds upon the details and teachings of the Synoptics and goes beyond them, emphasizing Christ's deity. John's book tells of Jesus' miracles and highlights the eternal life Jesus offers to all who believe in Him, inspiring belief in Jesus. No study of the Gospels would be complete without a special look at this beautiful and powerful Gospel of John.

3.1

Understanding John



Group Discussion: How did the patient love of Jesus change John between the time he first followed Jesus and the time he wrote his Gospel and Epistles? What transformation occurred in his life? What implications does this have for our own lives?

- *John and his brother, James, were nicknamed Sons of Thunder. They had wanted to call down fire from heaven to destroy the Samaritans (Luke 9:54). But John was one of the closest apostles to Jesus. He is referred to as “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” By the time John was an elder, he was gentle. He is sometimes called “the apostle of love.” God can change us, temper us, and use us for His glory.*



Review with students. Emphasize the reasons John was able to go in some different directions with his Gospel and not just cover all of the same ground as the three Synoptics. Since John likely wrote after the life and teachings of Jesus were well known, he had little need for repeating the stories and teachings covered in the other Gospels. Instead, John could fill in holes and address misunderstandings and heresies that had arisen in the years since the Synoptic Gospels had been written. False teachers had begun to attack the gospel, denying that Jesus was the Son of God who came in the flesh. John’s emphasis on Jesus as the Son of God was a necessary strong rebuke to this heresy. John repeatedly emphasized Jesus’ deity.



DISPLAY VISUAL 10

Briefly review with students John’s purposes for writing his Gospel that make it unique from the Synoptic Gospels.

John’s Purpose for Writing

“Jesus did many other miraculous **signs** in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may **believe** that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have **life** in his name” (John 20:30–31, emphasis added).

John emphasizes the following:

- **Signs**—Christ’s miracles, or signs, show that Jesus is the Son of God.
- **Belief**—believing is shown as acts of obedience: people who believed in Christ became His followers.
- **Life**—life comes from believing in Christ, the result of our relationship or connection with Jesus.



Group Discussion: John keys in on the word *believe*, using it at least ninety-eight times in the Gospel of John. What did John emphasize that it means to believe in Jesus? To what must belief always lead?

- *John stressed the action of believing as showing obedience. If people believed in Christ, they became His followers; if they did not believe, they often became His enemies.*



Review with students. John taught through examples what it means to believe in Jesus. Ask volunteers to look up the following verses and

summarize for each one the action that believing in Jesus compelled believers to take.

- **John 2:11.** When Jesus turned the water to wine, His disciples believed in Him and followed Him.
- **John 4:28–30; 39–42.** When the woman at the well believed in Jesus, she felt compelled to tell others about Him.
- **John 4:53.** When his son was healed, an official and his household believed in Jesus.
- **John 8:31–32; 6:66.** Jesus told believers they were truly His followers if they continued to follow him, and if they obeyed His teachings.
- **John 9:30–38.** When he was healed, the man born blind believed in Jesus and expressed his belief by boldly testifying for and worshiping Him.

To believe in Jesus means to receive and come to Him. It means to eat, drink, follow, hold to, enter through, listen to, obey, and remain in Jesus.

3.2

The Structure of John



DISPLAY VISUAL 11

As an option when using this visual, read aloud the introduction in John 1:1–18. Then briefly preview the three main characteristics of John's Gospel as introduced by John.

John's Introduction

John introduces readers to the three main characteristics of his Gospel:

1. Main person: the Word—Jesus, the Word in flesh, God
2. Main words: life, light, darkness, witness, believe, and truth
3. Main action: conflict—John used common words to show great contrasts and spiritual conflict.



Review with students. Write the following contrasting pairs where students can easily see them:

- Light *versus* darkness
- Physical birth *versus* spiritual birth
- Grace *versus* law
- Jesus as friend to those who receive Him and walk in the light *versus* Jesus as judge of those who refuse Him and remain in darkness

Ask four students to choose one of the pairs from the list and prepare to give a brief explanation of how John uses that particular contrast within his Gospel.



Group Discussion: In the last chapter of John, Peter learns that believing in Jesus requires giving himself completely to Christ's service (John 21:15–19). Thus, John's conclusion emphasizes the end result of the gospel. Like Peter, those who follow Jesus are guided to serve Him in some way. What are some ways you have been guided to service and action for Jesus?

➤ *Answers will vary.*

3.3

The Teachings of Jesus in John



Distribute Worksheet 3—Seven Signs in John. Give students five to ten minutes to look up the Bible passages and fill in the chart as a means of reviewing the seven signs, the truth each sign teaches, and the area of Jesus' lordship it reveals. You can allow students to work alone, in pairs, or in small groups.



Group Discussion: When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11), what did He teach about believing in Him?

➤ *Jesus is victorious over death and offers that same victory to us in the form of eternal life with Him.*



DISPLAY VISUAL 12

Before showing the visual, ask students to recall as many of the seven "I Am" statements as they can. Challenge students to memorize each of these vital statements. Discuss each point, briefly reviewing what is meant by each and why it is imperative to our daily lives as followers of Jesus. Note that an eighth "I am" statement, a direct statement rather than a comparison, is discussed in the textbook, from John 8:58.

Jesus' Seven "I Am" Statements in John

1. "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35).
2. "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12; 9:5).
3. "I am the gate" (John 10:7, 9).
4. "I am the good shepherd" (John 10:11).
5. "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25).
6. "I am the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6).
7. "I am the true vine" (John 15:1).



Review with students. Review the lessons John taught about believing in Jesus that are found in the lives and conversations of various individuals. Call attention to the names of these people, one at a time, and allow the entire group to work together to summarize the lesson.

- Andrew (We are called to bring others to Jesus, helping them to believe.)
- Simon Peter (Jesus changes our character as we believe in Him.)

- Nicodemus (We must be born again by believing in Jesus.)
- Philip (We learn more as we believe in and follow Jesus.)
- The Samaritan woman (Jesus satisfies all who believe in Him.)
- The blind man (Jesus gives sight to those who receive Him.)
- Martha and Mary (Life's greatest priority is sitting at the feet of Jesus.)
- Thomas (Jesus will perfect our faith in Him.)
- Pilate (The governor of Judea is an example of unbelief.)
- Judas Iscariot (He is the one who started out believing but turned away.)



Group Discussion: What lesson about believing in Jesus can others learn from your life?

➤ *Answers will vary.*



Review with students. John is the only Gospel writer who gives details of Jesus' farewell address to His disciples just prior to His crucifixion (John 13–16). In this private meeting with His disciples, Jesus foretold two central truths:

1. He would be leaving them soon. Although they could not go with Him, He promised to return and take them to His Father's house (John 14:1–4).
2. He would not leave them alone (John 14:18). He promised to send another Counselor—the Holy Spirit—to be with them.

Encourage students to summarize how each of these truths is just as vital for believers today.



Group Discussion: According to Jesus' private teaching to the disciples, what would the Holy Spirit do in, for, and through them?

➤ *The Holy Spirit would live in them (14:17), teach them (14:26), give them power to witness (15:26–27), and guide them into all truth (16:13).*



Group Discussion: In what ways should our ministry today be dependent upon the work of the Holy Spirit?

➤ *Answers will vary but should include such ideas as teaching, empowering to witness, and guiding into all truth. Encourage students to be specific, giving concrete examples.*



Conclude with prayer, asking Jesus to give students fresh empowering from the Holy Spirit for ministry and for daily living.