

Purposes and Approaches of the Four Gospels

MATTHEW

Purpose

To show that Jesus is the promised Messiah, the King of Israel, who will restore Israel, the children of Abraham, and royal tribe of Judah

Manifestations of this approach

1. Jesus is born King of the Jews
2. Baby Jesus is visited by Magi from the East
3. Jesus is presented as a new Moses, a new lawgiver
4. Jesus sends twelve disciples to the lost of Israel
5. Jesus fulfills many Old Testament prophecies

LUKE

Purpose

To show that Jesus is the Savior of all mankind, bringing salvation on earth to the sons and daughters of Adam through his redemption

Manifestations of this approach

1. Jesus is born in humble circumstances
2. Baby Jesus is visited by shepherds from the hills
3. Jesus is presented as wise child prodigy
4. Jesus sends seventy disciples to the nations
5. Jesus gives many universal, conciliatory parables

MARK

Purpose

To show that Jesus is God here and now on earth, coming in a prophetic mode with divine powers over spirits and forgiveness of sin

Manifestations of this approach

1. No account of the birth is given
2. Jesus is visited by the Spirit of God descending like a dove
3. Jesus is told, "Thou art my beloved Son" (1:11)
4. Jesus' disciples are very slow to understand
5. Jesus performs many powerful miracles

JOHN

Purpose

To show that Jesus is God forever on earth and in heaven, the great I Am, the image of the Father and his eternal love

Manifestations of this approach

1. Jesus is the Creator of the world
2. John the Baptist knew the Lamb before his baptism
3. Jesus is presented as the light and life eternal
4. Many disciples walk no more with Jesus
5. Jesus is in control of all from beginning to end

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Explanation

Because the testimonies of these four witnesses are extremely important in shaping our understanding of the Savior, detailed examination is often necessary. The results are enlightening and rewarding, even though challenges and difficulties often persist. Differences and even inconsistencies between the four Gospels beckon the best of minds to ponder and to reflect on their meaning. Can these differences be constructively understood and explained?

As seen in chart 7-2, where one begins, in any literary work, often determines where the work will also end, for it fundamentally influences the author's outlook, perspective, selection of episodes for inclusion, wording, and the resultant overall character of the work. With respect to the four Gospels, these consequences are demonstrated in chart 7-3, which illustrates how the overall purpose of each Gospel writer is manifested and carried out through several salient particulars in each Gospel.

Reference

Robert C. Patch, "The Gospel in the Gospels," *Ensign*, September 1974, 38–41.