

GOSPEL OF THE MESSIAH
Message 1

GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE GOSPELS: I want to introduce us to a new series of messages on the Gospels. In the years of preaching I have done I have not preached much from the Gospels and will now seek to do that. After the creation of the universe, the Gospels give us the greatest story ever told. We are not talking about a fairy tale. We are talking about that which happened historically.

Now, I would not have time to cover the Gospels verse by verse and so will give a somewhat detailed overview, if I could put it like that. When it seems we need a break from a steady diet of this subject, I will do a few other subjects in between. I mentioned the subject of the grace of God the other day. As I have time I will be working on that. I also want to someday give some of the reasons why the Church has lost a healthy fear of God. I believe it is due, in part at least, to doctrinal errors that have been taught in the last 1-200 years.

So, let me begin this introduction to the four Gospels by defining the word Gospel. The New Testament word for Gospel is *euangelion*. Vine's Dictionary says that this word, and I quote, "originally denoted a reward for good tidings; later, the idea of reward dropped, and the word stood for the 'good news' itself." You see, they did not have telephones or even telegraphs back in Bible days. So when urgent news was needed to be sent, it was sent by runners. And the word *euangelion* originally denoted the reward the runner would get for bringing the news, it was the tip he received. It seems to me that our English word translated Gospel should be 'evangel'. But somehow, in English, the word is translated 'gospel'. If you read Luther's German Bible, it is the word 'evangelium'. You can tell that comes from *euangelion*.

So let us consider our English word, 'gospel'. The English word 'gospel' comes from the Saxon words 'god' and 'spell', which became 'godspell' according to the Webster's 1828 dictionary. Our English word 'god' comes from the word 'good'. So it is 'goodspell'. Webster's says it then means a history, relation, narration, word, speech, that which is uttered, announced, sent or communicated; answering to the Gr. *Euangelion*, a good or joyful message. So our English word 'gospel,' basically means 'a good message,' or 'good

news'. Our words *evangel* or *evangelical* or *evangelistic* all come from the word euangelion. The Gospel then, is the good news, and in the Christian sense, it is the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, why is the account of the life of Christ good news? Well, to further introduce the Gospels or the Gospel we must go back to the beginning and find out what it is good in comparison to. We must first understand the bad news. And so, let us seek to understand the bad news. God had created the heavens and the earth. He had placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, and there He instructed them as to what they were and were not to do. We are very familiar with the story. We will look at this more later.

And so, here we have the account of how sin was born on earth. Sin and man's lost-ness is the bad news. Before this, sin had already been born in the universe in Lucifer. But now it had entered and contaminated mankind as well. Well, I want to do a little speculating here. There are some things the Bible only hints at and I understand that we must be very careful when we speculate. But I believe God originally created the angels as free moral agents to worship Him. They were to bring glory to God. God had created millions upon millions of angels. And they brought glory to God because they experienced of God's tremendous goodness. And then one day, one of God's highest angels, Lucifer, desired some of that glory for himself. Pride had found its way into his heart. You see, you cannot be a free moral agent if you cannot choose to do what you ought not to do. And so I have spoken to you a number of times about the fall of Lucifer. We find accounts of those events in Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28.

Now here is the speculation. It is sometimes questioned, why God made the devil and why God did not destroy him when he sinned. I know the answer to the first question. God did not create the devil. God created a wonderful, powerful angel called Lucifer and Lucifer sinned and became the devil. But why did God not destroy him when he sinned? Here is the speculation. I believe God could not destroy Satan and still have the rest of the angels worship Him of their own free will. They would have had to conclude that they were not truly free moral agents and that they had to glorify God and worship Him. If they did not, then like Lucifer, they would get the axe. And so, as I see it, from that time on until the end of the millennium, God's whole

plan hangs in the balances. And it is my view, you need not agree, but it is my view that God created the universe and mankind, so that in the end, He would be able to justly destroy the devil and still remain worshipped by angels and man as free moral agents. And this just destruction, I believe God will accomplish through man.

And so God created mankind. Psalm 8:1-5 says He created man a little lower than the angels. Well, some time after Lucifer rebelled, God spoke the universe into existence. I do not know that any matter existed anywhere until that Sunday, the first day of the universe, when God created the heavens and the earth. And then in six days there lay this vast expanse with billions upon billions of stars and millions of galaxies.

And on that sixth and final day of the creation week God created the crown of His creation, man. So turn to Genesis 1 (read 23-27). When you look at the head of a person, there, contained in that hollow of bone is a brain. And that brain, which the Bible calls the heart, exists as one of the most incredible and complex organs of all of creation. And somewhere in there, it seems to me, is the real person, that entity that we call 'the self' and is to exercise control under God over his or her entire being. And what God designed that most incredible being for, was to bring honor and glory to God Almighty. That is a whole subject all on its own. I deal with it in the first question of our Catechism which says, "What is the chief end of man?" Or, "Why am I here?" By the way, I have done some messages on the subject of why we are here, and they are available on sermonaudio.com/lhec. They are called, "Answers to Life's Most Basic Questions."

Well, the first creation week was over. All of creation was finished. And then God instructed man so look now at verses 28-31. I might mention, we have 33 sermons on Genesis 1-3 on [sermonaudio](http://sermonaudio.com) as well. Well, it says here God blessed man. God gave man the capacity to carry out all the instructions He gave them. So look at Genesis 2 (read 15-17). Now it is my view that in order for God to be able to justly deal with the devil, it would require man to live in obedience to God's requirements. It also required that man could choose to disobey those requirements. That is what free will is.

And so, Adam and Eve lived in obedience to God. It must

have been a most glorious time. But, lurking and scheming in the background was that fallen angel Lucifer. As I see it, he knew that if man chose to glorify God of his own free will, he Satan and his followers were doomed to hell. And beyond that, if he could get man to disobey God and to sin and do wrong, then he, Satan, would get that glory from man he so desired, and if that were the case, he would have defeated God and gained his own ends.

Let us now go to Genesis 3 to see what happened. But think of this. God could not step in and stop man from following Satan. If He did, man's free will would be destroyed. You see, one of the great questions of the unbeliever is this: If God is a loving God, why is there so much suffering in the world? I have shown you the Pulitzer winning picture of the small starving child with a big vulture sitting there ready to eat the child as soon as the child's strength is gone. How could a loving God allow that? I will tell you that the reason why there are pictures like that, and many, many more that we have never seen is not because there is some fault in God. It is because there is some fault in man. Man has to first give in to Satan before a picture like that can ever happen. So look now at verses 1-7 (read).

Now I know of an absolute certainty that God was not caught by surprise, either by Lucifer's fall, nor by the fall of Adam and Eve. 1 Peter 1:20 says that Jesus Christ was foreordained before the foundation of the world. Before God created the universe, the Triune God had agreed that the second Person of the Trinity would have to become man and die on man's behalf. Jesus said in John 17:20 that God loved Him before the foundation of the world. Revelation 13:8 says that Jesus Christ was the Lamb of God, slain from the foundation of the world. Matthew 25:34 talks about the millennium as the kingdom prepared before the foundation of the world. No, God was not caught by surprise. But if He would win over Satan, He knew that some day in the history of the world, He would have to surrender the second Person of the Triune God, One who would become Jesus Christ, to mankind and let mankind do with Him as they wished.

Some time ago I asked our men at a brotherhood meeting why God waited 4,000 years before sending Jesus Christ into the world. Why did He not send Him there in the Garden of Eden? We did not reach any conclusions but we gave it a lot of thought. Galatians 4:4 says that Jesus came in the fullness

of time. Now there are two words translated 'time'. They are *chronos* and *kairos*. And when it talks about the fullness of the time, we have the word *chronos*. I think we might say of this word that it speaks of the passage of time. We get our word 'chronology' from this word. And it seems to me that these 4,000 years had to pass before the passage of time was enough to make it the right time for Christ to come. He came at just the right time. He did not come too early or too late. Either too early or too late would have been disastrous to God's cause and would not have accomplished the purposes of God to defeat the devil. I expect that when the time was almost right, the devil sensed the danger he was in and he desperately sought for a man to bring Christ to an end. And so as soon as the Christ was born Satan sought to slay him. He found in Herod just the right kind of person to accomplish what he wanted, and had Herod kill all the young boys of 2 years old and younger around Bethlehem.

Romans 5:6 again mentions something in light of Christ coming at the right time. It says Jesus Christ came in due time. In the Greek the phrase is 'according to the time'. Now the word for time here is not *chronos*, but *kairos*. It speaks of time as a season. You see, in *chronos* you can tell the amount of time that has passed, but in *kairos*, you can tell the kind or season of time. Our farmers do not harvest according to the *chronos* of time, but according to the *kairos*, season of time. One year they might begin harvesting in August, but the next year in September. It depends not on the amount of time that has passed but the kind of time it is. That is a season of time. But Jesus came in the right *chronos* and the right *kairos* of time. He came at just the right time.

Jesus was born, according to our calendar, around 4 B.C. or maybe even a little before that. We know that because Herod, who had tried to kill Christ died in 4 B.C. If Pope Gregory had not made an error in his calendar, the year of Christ's birth should have been 0 B.C. The abbreviation B.C. means before Christ. So Jesus could not have been born before He was born. Julius Caesar made up the Julian Calendar in what we know as 46 B.C. That was the year 708 AUC. That is 708 years after the founding of the city of Rome. The Julian Calendar was based on a 365.35 day year. The Gregorian calendar corrected that to a 365.2425 year day. That is a change, according to Wikipedia, of .002 %.

So Jesus was born at the right time. Whatever the reasons were for that time being right, it needed 4,000 years for the chronology of time to become just right and it took a certain time or season of man's history, to bring us to that time. And during those 4,000 years the stage was set for the greatest moment of man's history to come, the time of the birth and life of Christ.

Now think with me for a moment. If Christ had come shortly after the time Adam and Eve sinned, we would have no OT or NT. And somehow, all those events that have happened were needed to make the Gospel what it was meant to be. And as we consider this, we have mentioned earlier that God was not caught napping when Satan sinned, nor when man sinned. He had a plan, about that there can be no question. And somehow, I have this feeling that the time of Christ's coming had to be at the right time and season in order that all of man's salvation in all stages would be by grace through faith.

And so, God had created man. He had a plan and in His plan He would not simply destroy man because man had sinned. And somehow, since man had chosen to sin, which is the bad news, in man's sinfulness, I believe, God would now turn that to be able to even more demonstrate His worthiness to be glorified and worshipped. Man's sin, and God's way of dealing with man has revealed in God attributes I do not know how else they could have been so fully revealed. In the midst of it all, God will be able to turn that which was meant for evil for good, for man, for angels and for Himself. I believe that for all eternity, as we learn more and more of God's being, we will just simply stand in awe again, and again, and again.

I was talking with one of the folk here the other day and he said, "You know, sometimes I am not sure exactly when I was saved because as I grow, sometimes I wonder was it there or there?" I said that salvation is as a tiny seed. If we are growing Christians, and we got saved quite young, then it is no wonder if sometimes we wonder when we were truly born again. If we were older and we came out of some depth of sin, then it is easier to tell. But I told him that even now, sometimes I feel like I am just beginning to learn. And here is what I think; that is how it will be for all of eternity! Getting to know God, and discovering what he has in store for those who trust Him will never know an end and we will never grow tired of it!

Well, God had created Adam and Eve. They had sinned. God had provided salvation for them by giving to them clothes made of animal skins. When they accepted that clothing and replaced the clothing they had sewed of vegetation, representing their works righteousness, they were saved. And from there on time progressed. From creation until the time of the flood, about 1650 years passed. Then at about the 2,000 year mark, Abraham was called by God to go to a land He would show him. And there is one chapter in the Bible that summarizes time from Abraham until the time of Christ. If you want to read a brief history of time from Abraham to the time of Christ, you can read Acts 7, Stephen's account of that time period.

In Acts 7:1-46 we have the time from Abraham to the time of the kings. That covers from 2,000 years after creation to 3,000 years after creation. Then in 7:47-53, we have the time from David until Christ. That brings us to 4,000 years after creation, or what should be zero B.C. And when we come to that time, we have arrived at the most significant event since creation! And from the time of Christ's birth until about 32 years later, we have certain inspired recorded events that tell us the greatest story of any man ever told! It is the story of all stories! It is the time of the life of the Jewish Messiah, Jeshua Hamashiach, Jesus the Christ.

Well, I understand that after Jesus ascended to heaven, over the course of the next 50-100 years, about 50 accounts of the life of Christ were written. But of all the Gospel accounts written, only four were inspired by God. That means they were divinely given. They are the first four books of the New Testament, books that we know as Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. And so, it is to this subject we will give ourselves for the next while.

A good number of years ago I began to seek to put the four Gospels into a format that would harmonize them. When I think back at the earlier computer programs I used when I began, I don't know how I originally accomplished that work. Later I got a better word processor and redid everything but by then I had most of the complicated part of the work put together. I only had to reenter it.

Now, when you harmonize the Gospels you put all the events side by side that are the same in the Gospels. Then you can

compare what each one says and you can consider the similarities and differences.

Harmonies of these Gospels have been written for almost 2,000 years. The earliest harmony of the Gospels was written by Tatian around 175 AD. That is almost 2000 years ago. It was called the Diatesseron. I believe the harmony I have done is the most detailed harmony that has ever been done.

It is from this work that I did that I want to take an outline for these present messages. I will not take time to introduce each of the four Gospels here at the beginning, but when we come to the first verses of each Gospel, I will introduce the writer and the book there. But let me give you some information to introduce to you how these four Gospels are viewed. The first 3 Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke are spoken of as the synoptic Gospels. The word 'synoptic' means 'seen together'. These three books deal with many of the same accounts. They see the life of Christ together. But John's Gospel is called the otoptic Gospel. That means it sees the life of Christ alone.

So, from the harmony I have done, let me show you what I mean (show and explain bar chart 1).

Now, in the synoptic Gospels, there is a difficulty Bible students wrestle with. You cannot buy a good book on the four Gospels or NT survey that do not mention this problem. The problem is this: If the writers, Matthew, Mark and Luke all wrote independently, how do we account for sections where one writer uses the exact same wording as another writer? How do we account for this? Various theories have been advanced to answer that question. It is very boring so I will only give you the theories very briefly. There is the oral tradition theory. The accounts of the life of Christ were handed down orally over the years and each of these writers wrote that down as best they could. Then there is the mutual interdependence view. This view says that two of the synoptists borrowed from the other. And last is the documentary hypothesis theory. This view says that Matthew and Luke built their Gospels on the basis of Mark's Gospel and a collection of sayings written in another source called the Q source. The Q stands for the German word Quelle, meaning 'source' (Merrill C. Tenney, 141). I have covered some of this in the introduction of the harmony I have done. For those who are interested,

there is a lot of information on the internet about that. Well, it appears that the majority of scholars favor the view that Matthew and Luke have followed Mark's Gospel.

There is another area of the synoptics I have called the chronology problem in my harmony. It is the only area in all four Gospels where the order of events differ in the synoptics. As I put the story of the life of Christ together, Jesus made eight trips to Jerusalem. And the only place where the chronology of events comes under question is between the fifth and sixth trips to Jerusalem. This time was spent in Galilee. Here Jesus went to many different places and many events are recorded in His life. But the synoptics do not give those events in the same order. Mark and Luke's order are very similar. They differ in only one event of 37.

Matthew's order is different in 17 of those 37 events. But in the harmony I have done I follow Matthew's Gospel. Why do I do that when the agreement between Mark and Luke is so great? Because Jesus spent his time between the fifth and sixth trip to Jerusalem in the Galilee area, where Matthew was a tax collector. And it is beyond question that Matthew observed Jesus' life very closely, because during this time that Jesus, seeing Matthew at the receipt of custom said to him, "Follow Me." No doubt Jesus had observed Matthew as well, and watched him grow in faith as he heard about Jesus. And when Jesus said, "Follow Me", Matthew got up from his job, left it, and followed Jesus as His disciple. No doubt Matthew, who lived in that area and was converted during that time and followed Jesus knew the order of events first hand. Mark and Luke got their order of events second hand.

That is all the time I want to take on that except to give you my conclusion to this whole synoptic problem. Here it is: It is not a problem. I believe in the inspiration of Scripture. God inspired each synoptic writer and conveyed through that writer precisely what He wanted written. They did not need to have to copy from anyone or have some source called the Q. They all had the same divine source, the Holy Spirit of God. I know that is very simplistic, but I believe the answer is simplistic.

Now, I want to show you one of the things that has really amazed me from the work on harmonizing the Gospels. When we put the Gospels together, end for end, we have 84,287

words. But since they all cover the same life, there is duplication in all four Gospels. So when you reduce any duplication to one account, the Gospel story now becomes 61,923 words. But if you take the duplicated sections and add any new words given by one of the Gospels, then the whole account now becomes 71,347 words long. So, out of 84,287 words, only 12,940 words are duplicated. That means only about 6 and 1/2% of words are duplicated. I was simply amazed when I calculated those results. In section 3 of the harmony I have done, I put the whole Gospel story into one flowing account with no duplication in it except for one brief piece.

Now I do not know how much of the Gospels I will be able to cover in the time I have left. But I do know it will not be enough to cover these books verse by verse. So I would appreciate your prayers that I may do it in a way that is most useful to help us to bring glory to God out of what we learn in the time we will have. Lord willing, if I get the time to study it out enough, I want to do at least a few messages on the grace of God, as I mentioned a while ago. And so if the series gets a bit long, we will take a break in between and do something like that. Also, if am able to cover one section of the Gospel story, we may break there for a while. And then, if I sense I am not ready yet to take on this task, I will have to change my plans. So I seek the wisdom and direction from the Lord and covet your prayers for that as well.

The Gospel story is the story of all stories of all time. The Gospel is the good news. The bad news was that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God and therefore are all condemned to death and hell. The good news is found in the life of Christ. In this life, in the end, He took our place in death and thus provided salvation for us. This is the good news, and His is this life we want to examine.