

BIG

QUESTIONS.

SIMPLE ANSWERS.

What is the
BIG STORY?

Why do we have
four gospels?



What is the Bible?

Who is
God's Family?

Practical, Easy-To-Use Devotionals Made for Families.

BIG QUESTIONS. SIMPLE ANSWERS.

GUIDE

WHAT IS IT?

This e-book consists of four sections to give you a complete understanding of the Bible. Written with children and teenagers in mind, they explain God's love story with a simple, clear, and brief explanation. The four sections are:

1. **What is the Bible?**
2. **What is the BIG STORY of the Bible?**
3. **Who is God's Family?**
4. **Why do we have FOUR Gospels?**

HOW DO I USE IT?

This e-book works in conjunction with the M2P FAMILY BIBLE SERIES.

1. **What is the Bible?** is a one-page, big picture description of the Bible itself, including its age, author, and volume. Think of this section as a blurb on the back of a book.
2. **What is the BIG STORY of the Bible?** explains God's Love Story into four parts: Creation, Rebellion, Redemption, and the Coming Kingdom. Think of this section like the summary on the jacket of a hardcover book.
3. **Who is God's Family?** covers the history of Israel to the early Church. Think of this section like an outline of the major characters in a movie.
4. **Why do we have FOUR Gospels?** outlines the differences between the four books that focus on the life of Jesus. They are Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

BIG QUESTIONS. SIMPLE ANSWERS.



WHAT IS THE BIBLE?

The Bible is a 66-volume library of books that tells the story of God with His people. It invites us to join in the story, too!

It shows us who God is, what He's like, and how to relate to Him. It shows us where the world came from, what went wrong (how evil and suffering got here), what God did to save the world, and where it's all going.

The Bible shows us ourselves—both the good and the bad. It tells us how we can be part of God's family, be forgiven by Him, and live our whole lives connected to Him. It shows us how to live! *(P.S. You might also hear people call the Bible "Scripture" or "the Word of God.")*

The Bible was given to us by God through a number of different writers at different times, and it's been faithfully passed on from one generation to the next!

Part of why we sometimes find it hard to understand the Bible is because it's so ancient! Its oldest parts are probably about **3,500** years old! *Whoa!* (We don't know the exact year because back then people didn't put dates on their books in quite the same way we do now.)

Even the Bible's youngest parts are almost 2,000 years old! *A lot has changed since then!*

We speak different languages than the original writers did. Our modern culture often works differently when it comes to government, jobs, sickness and health, money, and how men and women relate to society.

Our hearts and experiences have stayed the same, but a lot has also changed.

Every truth of the Bible still applies today—just as much as it did to the first readers! But sometimes we have to put in a little effort (and ask for God's help) to understand what it all means.

Knowing a bit of history helps. *(That's why we'll give you a tiny bit for each book.)* But one of the very biggest things we can do to help ourselves understand the Bible is to keep its big story in mind every single time we read!

BIG QUESTIONS. SIMPLE ANSWERS.

WHAT IS THE BIG STORY OF THE BIBLE?

CREATION
REBELLION (*GOING AGAINST GOD*)
REDEMPTION (*RESCUE BY GOD*)
COMING KINGDOM

CREATION

In the Old Testament book of Genesis, we read how God started His family on Earth. He has so much love to give! He created the entire universe with great joy—every animal and every tree, the clouds, the stars, and the first people (Adam and Eve). It was all so beautiful and good!

Adam and Eve were set as God's representatives (the people made in His image) to care for the earth and join Him in developing it to its perfect fullness. They would partner with God to build a family to fill the Earth!

God walked with Adam and Eve in the garden He'd made for them. It was all **so** perfect!

REBELLION

In Genesis 3, we read a really sad story. An *evil being* came to Adam and Eve and lied to them about God (especially to Eve). They were deceived (convinced of something untrue). They believed what this *evil thing* said more than they believed God. So, they broke His only commandment for them.

They chose to mistrust the One who loved and made them—the One from whom their whole lives flowed. Their action made a lot of terrible things begin to happen in

the world—death, sickness, frustration, violence, pain. And it didn't just happen to them. It happened to their children and their children's children that came after them. Even the earth itself and the animals suffered.

Sin (rebellion against God) separated Adam and Eve from the source of their life and their joy—God Himself. What God had made was now broken in pieces.

Evil had won for the moment...but because God is good, He couldn't allow evil to win in the end. You see, evil destroys things, but God gives Life.

Now the big problem was that God's beloved Adam and Eve had sin living in them! So, they had to experience the consequences of sin. It's scary to think about it, but did you know that we all have the same problem that Adam and Eve had? Every person since Adam and Eve (from moms, dads, grandmothers, sisters, pastors, teachers, best friends to yourself) has sin in them just like Adam and Eve did. This sin leads us to leave God and go our own way. All of us are born with both sin and good living inside of us. Good (because of God's image) and sin (because of evil).

The sin in us separates us from God, and that causes a lot of pain and problems. We



WHAT IS THE BIG STORY OF THE BIBLE?

were supposed to be connected to God like a branch is to a tree. He's our hope, our comfort, our protector, and our whole life! When we aren't connected to God, we begin to wither—to shrivel up and do and think worse and worse things. Sin does terrible things to us here on earth, but the Bible tells us that when we die, unless we've let God reconnect us to Him through Jesus, sin will complete its awful work then.

We'll be permanently separated from Him. That's the saddest and scariest thing that could happen! If Jesus hasn't forgiven us, we will have to take the punishment for all the things we did against God in this life. The Bible says that each of us will stand before Him one day as He looks over our lives. He will be our Judge. Not one person will be declared perfectly "innocent" (because we've all sinned—we've thought, said, and done evil things).

God is going to remove every trace of evil from His world, even when it's in us. The Bible says that in the book of Romans, "the wages (payment) of sin is death." Spiritual death is being separated from God.

But that's not the end of the story!!!

REDEMPTION (RESCUE)

God didn't want any of us to be lost! He didn't want judgment to be the final word for anyone! So, God set about doing everything it took to get us back!

Most of the rest of the Bible tells the story of how He fought to bring us back to Himself! Right after Adam and Eve rebelled against Him and broke His commandment, God made a promise that He would one day crush evil itself (and crush the one that deceived Adam and Eve). He would punish evil in such a way that it allowed His people to go free! He would forgive and clean their record,

swapping His goodness for their wrongness. He would make a way for restoration (putting things back right).

There were many stages in God's plan to bring us back! After the promise to Adam and Eve, generations went by. (You can read about that in Genesis 1-11. Big things happened!)

God knows the perfect timing for everything, and eventually, the next phase was ready to begin! From the very beginning, God had planned to build a big family. It would fill the whole world—there would be people from every tribe, race, and country! Part of God's strategy for bringing that into being was to focus the bright light of His presence in one spot for a while. It would be like a flashlight shining the way back Home to Him! God would dwell brilliantly with one people, and by looking at them, everyone could see how good He was and how good it was to belong to Him.

Here's how He did it!

In about 2100 B.C., God chose Abraham to be the start of a special family who would carry God's Light for all to see. He promised Abraham (who was very old!) that he was going to have a son! But that wasn't all! God said that this son would become a great nation. His descendants would be so many that they would be like the grains of sand on the beach or the stars in the sky! He promised that all the families of the earth would be blessed through Abraham (that's pointing to the purpose of Abraham's family and even more than that—to Jesus!). Abraham believed what God said! And God did it! The nation that God made through Abraham is called Israel. Israel became God's special "covenant people."

What's a covenant? There were many kinds of covenants when the books of Genesis



WHAT IS THE BIG STORY OF THE BIBLE?

through Deuteronomy were written (which is where you can read about this). *The one we're thinking of here is a sort of special relationship that's like a contract between someone very great and someone who depends on them.*

The covenant tells what the great person will do, and how the person receiving the promise should live because of it. It spells out the consequences if either breaks their promise.

Why did God make Israel His special covenant family?

The goal was for everyone (every nation around) to see what it's like to be loved by God and want to come to Him as fast as they could! Israel was going to be God's light to all the nations! It was a very special privilege. He gave them His words (recorded in the Old Testament). He gave them His presence (which was focused at His Temple), His provision (meeting all their needs), and taught them about His way of living. He even gave them discipline when they needed it. **

Over centuries and centuries, God continued to love them, even though they often didn't keep their part of the covenant. (The Old Testament tells us those stories.) Sometimes, God revealed future parts of His big plan. For example, many years later, He gave them a good king named David. God used that King to point toward King Jesus. God gave them prophets (truth-tellers with messages from Him) to remember His ways and even spot Jesus when He came. God promised Israel that it would really happen: people from every tribe, race, language, and nation would fill His family, and they would all be with Him forever.

He promised that one day, He would send a special Rescuer who would heal people, free them, and forgive their sin. God would

come to be with them (in the form of the Holy Spirit)! He would give them eternal (forever) life and all God's love. Things would change forever!

That all happened when Jesus came to earth. He lived in perfect connection with God, was crucified (killed) to take the punishment for our sin, and then God raised Him from the dead! In dying, He defeated death itself! He fulfilled many of the promises God made in the Old Testament! Jesus was the Plan all along!

When He died, He made a whole new covenant (the relationship contract between someone great and someone who depends on them) with us!

The way we respond to it is by believing Him! We trust what He's done for us! In this new covenant, God forgives of all our sin (our evil)—past, present, and future—and He makes us new! When God comes to live in us, He's always with us every minute of every day! God's love is so fierce that not even death can separate us from His love! Wow! That's really good news!

Now, God invites us to join His family of Light-carriers (He's expanded Israel to include everyone who will come!). We work to live as God does—with love! We introduce others to Jesus because He's the very best thing. He's everything! With our whole lives, we show and tell who He is. That's a high calling! We're joining God as He makes His family bigger and bigger!

** You can read more of the story and some of its important characters in WHO IS GOD'S FAMILY???



COMING KINGDOM (CELEBRATION!)

All of that is amazing, but the best is actually yet to come! There's one more really big chapter that shows us the grand finale of God's plan to restore the world.

When Jesus rose from the dead, He spent about 50 days teaching His disciples (close learners), and then He went back to Heaven. Jesus' resurrection (rising from the dead) began His reign as the true King of the whole earth! He showed us His way of conquering (by service and love!).

One day, Jesus will return to Earth to establish His kingdom fully—in person! The Bible tells us that God's presence will be so bright we won't even need a sun or moon! The entire earth will be put back to right—even better than right, actually! All that evil has done will be torn away and burned. All the sickness, death, sorrow, and frustration brought about by sin will be erased.

The world will be made new! And God's people will be new, too! Just like Jesus was raised from the dead, He's promised to raise us, also! That's right! We'll spend forever with Him! We'll eat, and drink, and play, and enjoy God, the world, and each other. We might even work, but it will be good and satisfying work!

God's story with humanity began in a garden (Eden) when He created Adam and Eve. Jesus prayed hard in a garden (Gethsemane) before He paid the ultimate price to save us. And in the new heavens and earth, there will be a garden, too!

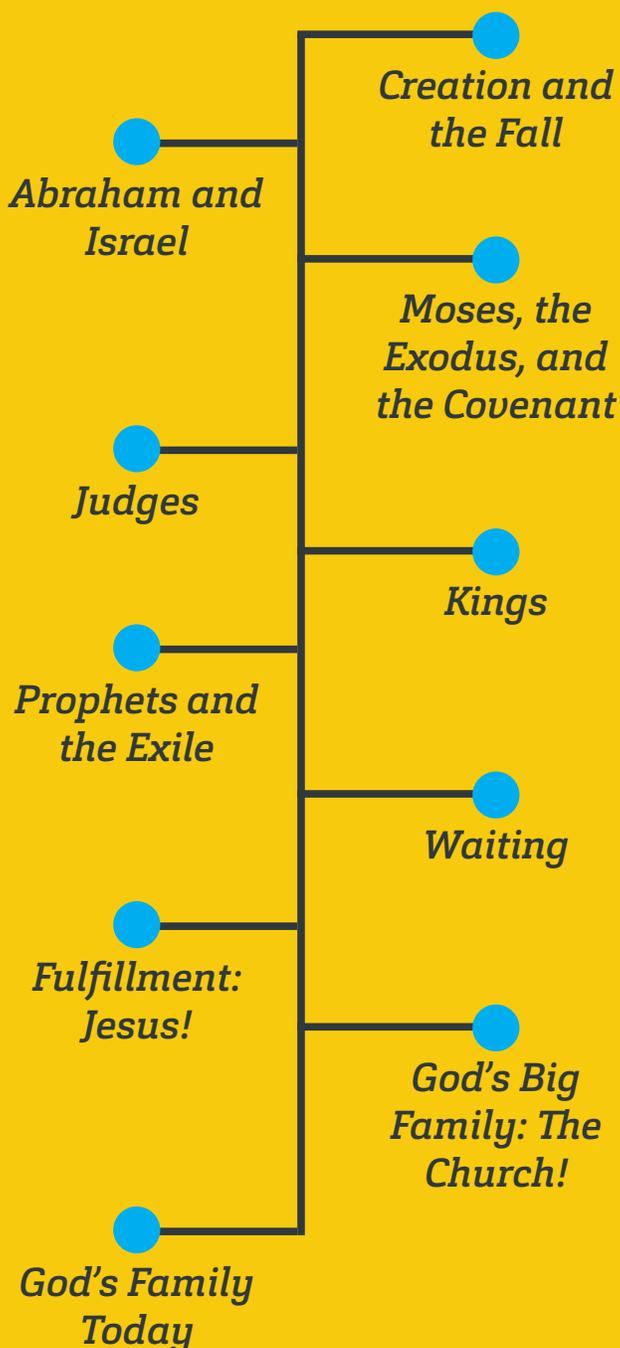
Take some time to read Revelation 21 and 22! It's a beautiful vision of all things, finally being as God intended! It will be even better than ever! Anyone who wants to be there with King Jesus can be! All it takes is trusting that He makes you right with God once and for all.

BIG QUESTIONS. SIMPLE ANSWERS.



WHO IS GOD'S FAMILY?

A HISTORY: ISRAEL AND THE EARLY CHURCH



CREATION AND THE FALL (THE REBELLION AGAINST GOD)

When we read the Old Testament, we learn the story of God with His people leading up to Jesus. In Genesis 1 and 2, we hear how God made humanity (people) in His image to care for, rule, and fill the earth. They would be God's family and His representatives in the world—living out His ways and bringing the earth to its highest purpose.

But one short chapter later, we hear the sad story of how they were deceived (they chose to believe something untrue) and purposely broke God's only commandment. This disobedience brought a lot of sorrow into the world. (You can read more about the BIG story of the Bible in *What is the BIG STORY of the Bible?* It will give you background to help you understand every book of the Bible better!)

Adam and Eve's sin (against God) separated them and their descendants from God. But God had a plan to get humanity back—to rescue them. He wasn't going to leave us without any hope of being His forever! Part of God's plan, including making a family for Himself on earth that would show His light to people everywhere. They would be like priests to the rest of the world.

What's a priest? It's someone who serves people by helping them learn about and connect to God. This family would be huge—a whole nation (or people group)! There would be so many of them that they would be like the stars in the sky!



ABRAHAM AND ISREAL

God started this family with one man—Abraham. God promised Abraham (who had no children and was quite old already) that he would have a son and from that son would come a whole nation! God also promised that one day He would lead His family to a special place all their own. The land would be amazingly fruitful! They would have all they needed. But it was also a place with a special purpose.

Important roads ran through this land, and people from other nations had to pass through it to travel almost anywhere. As they came through this special land, God hoped that they would see His goodness and how His family lived and want to join it.

God would focus His presence right there among His people (called Israel). It was going to be a bright light to every other nation so that they could see God. But God's plan also went far into the future! He told Abraham that all the families of the earth would be blessed because of him. Israel was to be a part of that blessing. But it was also a reference to Jesus—the Messiah. The Messiah is a title for God's rescuer. **You can read about this in Genesis 12, 15, and 17.**

This news was amazing! God also told Abraham about something hard that was going to happen to Israel first. Through some specific events, they would become slaves in the land of Egypt. You can read about all of that in the book of Genesis (especially starting in chapter 11) and in the book of Exodus. God showed Abraham a vision of what He had planned for Israel and the hard parts that would happen. There would be about 400 hard and sad years (Genesis 15).

MOSES, THE EXODUS, AND THE COVENANT

All of this came about just as God said it would. Abraham's descendants became a huge nation (nation really means a group of people in this case), but they were enslaved in Egypt under an unkind ruler—Pharaoh. Their lives were very difficult. But God heard their cries, and He kept His promises!

God sent someone to deliver them! His name was Moses. He was a prophet (someone who gives God's messages to the people). God freed Israel from Egypt and showed His mighty power! This is one of the biggest moments in the whole Old Testament (It's called "The Exodus")! The people were supposed to remember it forever with a special holiday! **You can read about this in Exodus (especially chapters 1-18) and Deuteronomy.**

God brought the people into the wilderness and made a covenant with them. A covenant is like a special relationship contract. In this case, it's a contract between someone very great and someone who depends on them. It was such a special privilege to be in a covenant with God!

The Bible calls this covenant "the Law" or the "Old Covenant." You may have heard of the Ten Commandments—that's one part of it! You'll hear about "the Law" or "the Old Covenant" again and again in the New Testament!

The covenant told the people how God would care for them and how God wanted them to live in response. It showed them what would happen if they lived in God's ways and what the consequences would be if they didn't. It gave them a temporary way to be forgiven for their sins (through the sacrifices which point forward to Jesus!).



“The Law” is God’s set of family rules! It also showed Israel how to fulfill its mission of showing God’s light to all the nations! **You can read about this in Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, and Joshua.**

God began to lead Israel toward the special land He’d promised to give them, but many felt scared and didn’t believe that He would do what He’d promised. So, they rebelled (went against Him), which led to some awful things! But God kept His word and brought the next generation of Israel’s people into the land He’d promised. It was called Canaan. **You can read about this in Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, and Joshua.**

THE TIME OF THE JUDGES

Years went by, and Israel pretty much forgot about God. They began to ignore His commandments. They broke His covenant over and over and over. God was very patient with them, and He continued to remind them.

Because He’s a good Father and King, He eventually sent painful consequences to help turn them back to Him. Israel was missing her God, her peace, and her whole purpose. **You can read about this in the book of Judges.**

THE TIME OF THE KINGS

Eventually, a new chapter in the story came! About a thousand years before Jesus came, God gave Israel a King. Israel’s greatest King (King David) was a man after God’s own heart, and He used him to show them a little bit of what the true King from Heaven would be like one day.

God also promised that one of David’s descendants would always be on the throne of Israel. (Jesus was in the line of David! His mother, Mary, was one of David’s

descendants!) **You can read about this in the books of 1 and 2 Samuel and parts of 1 Chronicles.**

THE TIME OF THE PROPHETS AND THE EXILE

Many difficult things happened in the centuries that followed as God’s family chose sin instead of Him. The nation was torn in two after King David’s reign. The people again forgot God and ignored His ways.

So, God sent prophets (who spoke for Him) over many years to warn the people. He begged them to listen to Him and turn from their wickedness. But they wouldn’t.

So, God sent other nations to bring judgment on them. They took them away from their homeland into exile for about 70 years. It was so sad!

Israel should have been a light to the nations, but instead, God had to use those nations to discipline them and bring them back to Him! The temple of God was even destroyed! **You can read about these things in the prophetic books from Isaiah to Malachi.**

God also spoke to the prophets with words of comfort. He told them that the punishment wouldn’t last forever.

God would bring Israel back to its land and restore it. He would even give them soft hearts—they would obey Him from the inside out! A descendant of David would one day be King again in Israel! **You can read about these things in the prophetic books from Isaiah to Malachi.**



THE TIME OF WAITING

God kept His word!

Even before Jesus came, many of Israel's people had been allowed to return home! The temple had been rebuilt. But the nation was still controlled by another government (Later, during the time of Jesus, it was the Romans.).

So, Israel waited for the time when God would send the Deliverer (His Messiah) to restore their freedom. There are about 400 years of waiting between the Old and New Testaments. It's called the "Intertestamental period." We don't have any record of God speaking during that time. It's almost like a huge deep breath of silence.

THE TIME OF FULFILLMENT: JESUS!

When the moment came for God to send His rescuer, He had much bigger freedom in mind than just releasing them from the Romans! He wanted to free people from the grip of evil itself—from sin and its awful consequence of death! **(You can read more about that in *What is the BIG STORY of the Bible?*)**

God had promised (through the prophets) that a new chapter in the history of His family was going to come! He would be with His people in a new way! He would speak to them directly—not through prophets anymore. He would make their hearts clean from the inside out! They would love God and each other from the heart, and they would keep God's commands! Each person would fulfill what God had originally designed for Israel to be—a light to the nations! They would be completely forgiven because of Jesus' sacrifice.

So, when Jesus came, He wasn't starting a new religion! He was bringing God's plan and the Jewish faith to fullness! His teachings

built on the instructions of the Old Covenant.

Remember "the Law" (the Old Testament code of how to live rightly in response to God's love)? Jesus said that He didn't come to abolish (get rid of) even a single word of it. He came to fulfill it—to bring it to its' highest purpose!

Jesus was the fulfillment of God's promise to Eve, Abraham, David, and the Prophets! All the threads of the story were coming together! He was the Messiah (the rescuer), the perfect sacrifice, the true King, and God Himself! Wow! **You can read more about this in Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts.**

THE TIME OF GOD'S BIG FAMILY: THE CHURCH

But God didn't stop there! Pretty soon after Jesus gave up His life, rose from the dead, and went into Heaven, the Holy Spirit began to draw more and more people of different backgrounds to believe in Him! They all became a part of God's family. Many of them weren't Jewish!

The make-up of God's family grew more and more diverse. People began to come from every race and tribe! God was expanding Israel's family to include anyone who believes in Jesus! **You can read about this in the book of Acts (It's an incredible story!).**

All of this was so exciting and joyful! But there was also conflict. Not all of the Jewish people had believed that Jesus was really the Messiah (God's rescuer). Some Jewish leaders fought against Him (they had even been a part of having Him killed). And after He died, they kept fighting against His followers, too. **You can read about this in Acts (God even used the danger to bring about good things!).**



Even among those who believed in Jesus, there was a bit of confusion. Some people in Israel didn't realize that God's family really did include Gentiles (those who weren't in the family line of Abraham)! They didn't see yet that being in God's family wasn't about who your parents were, but whether you believed in Jesus, the Messiah! They were just beginning to realize that God's plan all along had been to welcome people of every kind into His household! It was truly great news! **You can read about this in Acts and Romans.**

One last problem you'll hear about (in Paul's letters) is that some people were trying to say that Gentile (non-Jewish) believers still had to keep the Old Covenant laws (its rules, holidays, etc.) if they wanted to please God. What those people didn't understand was that Jesus had made a whole New Covenant (relationship contract) by dying on the cross!

With His life, Jesus had fulfilled all the terms of the Old Covenant perfectly! It was done! God's instructions were now written on people's hearts! This New Covenant had so much freedom! **You can read about this in Acts, Galatians, Romans, Colossians.**

GOD'S FAMILY TODAY

In summary, we can say that the history of Israel is Jesus' history too!

He created Israel, He's part of it, and He brought it to its' fulness! It's hard to see all the beauty of who Jesus is unless we see that whole story!

If you're a believer in Jesus, you're now part of the story, too! We've been made a part of the family of faith that God built through Abraham! We're in his family line by faith (Galatians 3)!

God has made Israel bigger and bigger, welcoming all who will come! Now we all share in the mission to love God and carry His light to everyone while we wait for His return! That's a beautiful calling! **You can read about this in Romans and Galatians.**

This short list will help you remember the order of the story:

Adam and Eve

Abraham

Moses

David

The Prophets

Jesus

The Church

BIG QUESTIONS. SIMPLE ANSWERS.

? WHY DO WE HAVE FOUR GOSPELS?

WHAT ARE THE GOSPELS?

The word “gospel” means Good News!

The books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are called the four gospels because they tell us that the Rescuer we’ve been waiting for all along has COME!

Each one tells us the *biography of Jesus, God Himself (!)*, who came in human form to give His life and save the world. They show us what He was like, how He treated people He met, His teachings, promises He made, miracles He performed, brave things He did to save us, and how people responded.

WHY ARE THERE FOUR (AND WHY ARE THEY EACH A BIT DIFFERENT)?

John tells us that if all the things Jesus did while He was on earth had been written down, there’d be so many books *the world couldn’t hold them! Whoa!*

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John hand-picked scenes from Jesus’ life under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (who is God). Each one chose stories and teachings of Jesus that help us notice something a little different about who Jesus is and what He came to accomplish.

Ancient biographies (*or really, really old stories that are true about people*) weren’t written in the same way they are now. People could choose to organize events by themes (such as “Jesus the King”) or rearrange the order to shine a light on a particular point they were making. That’s part of the reason

why the four gospels are a little different from one another!

The Gospels focus on special parts of Jesus’ life and mission or show us a certain part of His character (His heart).

Matthew helps us see how Jesus is the fulfillment (the coming together) and the continuation of the Old Testament story. He opens his biography of Jesus with a history of the generations of family members before Jesus. He wants us to see how every story has led up to His coming. Matthew quotes a lot of the Old Testament to help us make connections.

Mark highlights Jesus as the King—especially as the King who suffers to save His much-loved people. It shows Him as fully human and fully God, and SO FULL of power. He focuses a lot on the last week of Jesus’ life, His death as a sacrifice, and His resurrection (rising from the dead).

Luke highlights how Jesus accepts and loves people who weren’t always welcome in society—the sick, the poor, and even those who had lived lives that weren’t good by God’s standards (or even man’s). Jesus seeks those people like a shepherd searches for sheep that are lost from a flock. Luke gives us the most details of Jesus’ life (especially His birth and early years!).

Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called “the synoptic gospels.” Synoptic means “having the same view.” These three books have a lot in common because they contain many of



the same stories and use a similar style of writing.

The fourth gospel writer, **John**, chose differently!

He has a unique way of storytelling. He shows us a lot of behind-the-scenes moments, like Jesus praying on the night before He was arrested and the special conversation that Jesus had with Peter after the resurrection (Jesus rising from the dead). John's book is full of word pictures and even poetry. It shines the light brightly on how Jesus is God! There's no one else like Him!

God knew that it would take four different writers with different backgrounds, personalities, and understandings to give us the fullest view of Jesus!

AUTHOR

Christi Schroader and her husband Shayne live in St Louis where they are rehabbing a 100+ year old wooden house with a lot of dust. Christi loves to cook, write, hike, and learn. She's currently pursuing an MABTS at Covenant Seminary, and is a recent contributor to the journal *Presbyterion* (Fall 2020). She's been ministering in one capacity or another for twenty years, and loves (whether in print or in person) to help others see how beautiful, logical, interesting, and powerful the Bible is.

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