

The Gospel of

MATTHEW

CHAPTERS 15-17

SECTION 1:

FACING JERUSALEM

Throughout the gospels, you'll see the same phrase repeated a handful of times: "He set his face toward Jerusalem." Shortly after the disciples realized that Jesus was the Messiah and the Son of God, he began to reveal what would happen to him.

"From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised." (Matthew 16:21)

The disciples thought going to Jerusalem meant overthrowing their Roman oppressors and forming a new kingdom with Jesus on the throne and with them at his side. Jesus knew that going to Jerusalem meant suffering. He knew that he was "setting his face" against all the powers of evil and darkness, and that he would need to be crucified to defeat sin and death.

Despite the horrors that Jerusalem represented to Jesus, he was determined to go to that city where he would suffer, and be lifted up as the Messiah, the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world.

SECTION 2:

WHAT DID JESUS SAY?

Jesus wanted to hear from his disciples what ideas were floating around about himself. The question he asked is written slightly different in each of the gospels.

“Who do people say that the **Son of Man is?**” (Matthew 16:13)

“Who do people say that **I am?**” (Mark 8:27b)

“Who do the crowds say that **I am?**” (Luke 9:18b)

So what did Jesus actually say? It is common for people to be quoted differently in the gospel accounts. Though some may seem contradictory, they usually happen for good reason.

4 Reasons the Gospels Differ in Wording

Translation

It's likely that Jesus spoke primarily in Aramaic. But the gospels were written in Greek. That means that Jesus' words had to be paraphrased and translated from one language to another, and a lot of phrases don't translate well. The writers had to choose equivalents for Jesus' words in an entirely different language, making every quote an interpretation.

Instances

Jesus did and said much in his life on earth. Surely he asked similar questions more than once, healed a blind man more than once, and cast out more demons than are recorded. In some cases, the apparent contradictions in the quotes of Jesus are probably completely different occurrences of Jesus doing the same thing. He may have said both at different times.

Perspectives

If you ask two people to describe an event, you'll likely get two completely different responses. They're both truthful but their stories highlight the differences between them. The stories of Jesus were written by different people, with different backgrounds and personalities. Because of these, the authors focus on some things while omitting others. Each gospel is a truthful account. They're just told by different people.

Intentions

When writing their accounts, the gospel writers were focused on speaking to particular groups (ex. Matthew to Jews, Luke to Gentiles). The gospel writers had to have in mind each audience's knowledge of the Scriptures and cultural priorities. Through their presentation to these audiences, various truths about Jesus and his mission were highlighted.

In the case above, the most likely explanation is the fourth. Matthew's gospel account was written primarily for a Jewish audience, people that would have understood the “Son of Man” reference from Daniel 7 and also that Jesus was speaking of himself. On the contrary, Mark and Luke's gospels were written primarily for a Gentile (non-Jewish) audience, people who were mostly ignorant of the Jewish Scriptures and Jesus' self-designation as the “Son of Man.” Mark and Luke were likely just saving their audiences from a small bit of confusion. It doesn't make Mark and Luke wrong—They're simply good writers who know their audience.

Differences aren't contradictions. The differences we see in the gospels don't detract from our understanding of Jesus. On the contrary, because of the diversity of the authors, audiences, and words used, the differences give us a fuller picture of Christ.

SECTION 3:

THE SUFFERING SERVANT

Up to this point, Jesus has spoken in symbols and veiled language. But Matthew 16:21-23 is the first time he addresses his suffering, death, and resurrection openly. Even though the disciples understand the mysteries of Christ more than anyone, Peter's rebuke reveals how little they understand the kind of messiahship Jesus has in mind—one of suffering and death.

In Isaiah 52:13–53:12, we read a prophecy about a future suffering servant who God would make victor over evil by allowing him to be rejected and beaten. This servant would play the role of a sacrificial guilt offering (Lev 5-6), providing atonement for God's chosen people, allowing them to be pronounced righteous.

Jesus had to teach his disciples that he was the person Isaiah was pointing to. Through suffering, Jesus would conquer Satan, sin, and death, securing eternal life for his people.

SECTION 4:

PERSPECTIVE OF THE PHARISEES

When we read the Bible, it can be easy to see the failures of the people within the story and assume that we would have done better. But try to put yourself in the shoes of the Pharisees for a moment: from their perspective, they were just trying to do what they thought was best for Israel. They wanted to obey God's Law to the letter, and they thought the best way to do that was to add stricter laws on top so they could avoid even coming close to breaking it. A modern example of this might be driving 45mph on I-29 so you can be absolutely certain you aren't going to break the speed limit of 55mph. While this probably came from a good heart initially, the Pharisees' traditions quickly became a burden to the people, and Jesus rebuked them for it.

It's important to realize that, were we in their place, we would likely have done the same; as humans, we all carry this tendency to place burdens on ourselves that we were never meant to carry. Praise be to God then that Jesus gives us rest.

**"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."
(Matthew 11:28)**

SECTION 5:

THE TRANSFIGURATION

The obscure story called “the Transfiguration” found in Matthew 17:1-8 is one of the most important events in the life of Christ, right up there with his baptism, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. But what does it really mean to be “transfigured?”

“And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light.” (Matthew 17:2)

Transfigure is translated from the Greek verb “metamorphoō”—where we get the word *metamorphosis*. It can also be translated as “transform” or “change in form.” In this story, while Jesus was praying on the mountain, he underwent a change. For a short moment, he was radiantly transformed. The disciples said “his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light.” While on earth, Jesus’ humanity veiled his glory. But in this transformation, the veil was pulled back and Christ’s radiant glory was revealed—displayed in the form of whiteness and bright light. And this light wasn’t shining on him but from him. It was a reminder of the glory he had before he became a man and a preview of his future exaltation, a taste of a future heaven where Christ’s glory will be manifested completely and openly where “they will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light” (Rev 22:5).

Just a few days prior to the transfiguration, Jesus told his disciples that he would have to suffer and die. He taught that true discipleship involves suffering, that following him involves self-denial and sacrifice. The disciples needed encouragement. They needed some kind of affirmation that Jesus truly was the Son of God and that suffering for Christ’s sake is worthwhile. The transfiguration gave them that encouragement.