

Why 4 Gospels?

Introduction: the fact that there are 4 gospels is one of the most amazing things with respect to Scripture; and is almost unheard of in ancient literature.

1. First of all, it might be a good idea to review the gospels; who wrote what, and what was their relationship to Jesus Christ.
 - a. The book of Matthew was written by a disciple of Jesus who observed the events contained therein. He was also a man who knew the Scriptures or learned the Old Testament Scriptures and spent more time correlating the life of our Lord with Old Testament Scripture (however, it is quite interesting that there are many, many more Old Testament Scriptures which pertain to our Lord than we find in the New Testament).
 - b. John Mark is closely associated with the Apostle Peter; and Peter observed the events recorded in the book of Mark. We actually do not know how this book ends, as the ending found in most English translations is bogus. The true ending of this book may have given us a clue or two about this book. Whether Peter dictated and Mark wrote, or whether Peter told Mark about these things and Mark later wrote them down, we don't know. However, we may reasonably assume that Mark got this information from Peter directly, and that the book is the product of a lengthy interview, possibly spanning several decades. It is unclear to me the relationship between Mark and Matthew, although one author probably had access to the other book. Logically, it would be the Mark had access to the writings of Matthew.
 - c. Luke did not observe any of the events which he recorded in the Gospel of Luke, although he knew many people who had observed these events. He also, apparently, had access to the book of Mark and the book of Matthew. Luke indicates that he made an attempt to record as much historical narrative as possible, and in the order that these events occurred. Luke, being a Greek (the only Greek to write Scripture), thought more like we do—logically and chronologically. He obviously made use of the texts of Mark and Matthew, but probably was not privy to John's text, which could have been written last. Luke was able to speak to some of the disciples of Christ and obtain information that way (which he might of have done, at times, in order to get more specifics of an event, or to get the chronology down). Luke also wrote the book of Acts, some of which he experienced and observed; other portions of which, he learned by direct interviews.
 - d. The book of John is written by John, who had a very limited Greek vocabulary, but was able to record some of the most fundamental principles of doctrine with the few words that he had at his disposal. John was an eyewitness to the events which he recorded; but, in my opinion, he probably wrote this book much later in life. Remember that these men were not writers by trade. They did not necessarily carry a diary with them on their walks with Jesus, to which they attended later in the night. John was a fisherman and Matthew was a tax collector. Matthew would have had some experience with reports as a tax collector. John may have been barely literate (although it is also possible that he did not speak Greek as his native language and therefore struggled with putting his gospel together).
2. The Old Testament tells us, in the mouths of 2 or 3 witnesses shall a thing be confirmed (this was said with respect to the laws of evidence). So, what we have with John and Matthew's gospel are the witness of two men to the historicity of the events recorded in their books.
3. Now, Matthew and John were very different. In Matthew, you will find the most references to Old Testament and their fulfillment in our Lord. In John, although there are these references, John also includes many of the fundamental principles taught by our Lord to His disciples; and, interestingly enough, we find out more about the other disciples in the Book of John than in any other book. Matthew was obviously educated, and well-versed in Old Testament Scripture. John was a blue collar

type who became somewhat of a blue collar intellectual. He was intelligent and observant; but he did not apply this to scholarly activity until later in life.

4. The fact that we have two gospels is remarkable, as it is rare in ancient history (perhaps unheard of?) that we have two documents of two men who observed the same thing. I cannot come up with a single example of anything else in ancient history literature which is comparable.
5. Why then, two more gospels? Mark acts as a 3rd witness, as he apparently received his information from Peter, who was not much of an intellect, although his epistles are certainly worthy of study.
6. Luke's gospel is particularly interesting, as Luke is both an historian and a physician. This implies that Luke is going to be well-educated and very precise and methodical. Since he obviously draws from the books of Matthew and Mark, it is clear that he accepts them as being historically accurate.
7. To take this further, you need to be aware of other historical facts:
 - a. Jesus taught for a very short period of time. There are no religious leaders whose ministry was as compact as our Lord's. After deserting his wife and children, Buddha spent the rest of his life teaching (50 years?). Mohammed spent the bulk of his life conquering other people and spreading his false religion (40 years?).¹
 - b. Jesus taught the gospel (the good news) in a very limited geographical area. Buddha traveled as far as his feet would take him; Mohammed conquered as many territories as he was able to, and imposed his Satanic beliefs on the people whom he conquered.
 - c. Even during the short time that Jesus taught, He was not popular. This is obvious, as he was persecuted and eventually brought by the Jewish religious hierarchy to the Roman authorities to be executed. Although many accepted Him, there are many at that time who rejected Him. In fact, the Jews in general, despite the fact that Jesus is their Messiah, rejected Him.
 - d. After our Lord was put to death and rose again from the dead, the gospel (good news) of his death and resurrection were spread across the world. This was not received in all places gladly. The Apostles were persecuted and most of them, by tradition, executed for their beliefs and their public teaching.
 - e. A parallel situation might be if an accurate Christian missionary set up shop in Lebanon today. Some religious types, even Catholics, would reject him. Other groups would be outright hostile toward him and seek to kill him (Hezbollah).
8. The reason I bring in the history is so that you realize that these few Jews and Gentiles who spread the gospel of Christ throughout the ancient world were not generally well-received, and that they did not do this for their own personal benefit.
9. What we should find from that time period is, those who wrote and questioned their beliefs and this historical accuracy of what they taught. We do not have any books from the first century which question the historical accuracy of Jesus, His miracles, His death or His resurrection. Bear in mind that, the world would have embraced such books; the writer of such a book would have been quite popular and celebrated, unlike those who wrote the gospels and the epistles. Recently in Iran, there was the Holocaust Seminar, where people from all over the world who denied that the Holocaust occurred gathered to share their opinions. This is despite the fact that we even have people living today who observed firsthand what occurred. What has become a modern phenomenon is people will write and say whatever is on their mind, regardless of the accuracy of these statements. I've seen these things spread in anti-Bush emails. We have *bloggers* today who write whatever opinion that they have and many either distort or edit or even make up facts in order to support their opinions. Obviously, there have always been liars; however, today, there are many more who have, shall we say, *a voice*. I think that much of this began in the 1960's not necessarily with lies, but with propaganda and the reporting of certain aspects of the news which furthered a certain agenda. I think

¹ I don't know the exact dates; these are what I recall from my studies.

that in the past 10 years or so, it has become apparent to some that if you repeat the same lie over and over again, it will be accepted as truth (did that come from Lenin or Stalin?).

10. My point in this is, anyone who observed the same events that the writers of the gospels did, could have given their own take. They could have written their own book, the anti-Gospel; and it would have been well-received. People allege that the Apostles wrote what they did for self-interest (which is foolish, as what they wrote and taught was quite unpopular with the culture of their day). So, what we should expect to find from this historical period is a huge number of books written which dispute the historical events of the gospels; however, since that period of time was a bit more truthful, no such books have ever surfaced.
11. It is generally accepted that these gospels were written during the 1st century A.D.; and we have manuscripts which go back to the 2nd and 3rd centuries A.D., which is also rare for ancient manuscripts (I think that only the New Testament has manuscripts extant today which were written that close to the time that the original manuscript was written).
12. Now, although we tend to think of the Bible as this cohesive whole (which it is), these other gospels, at the beginning, were not so preserved. That is, several groups may preserve the gospel of John, making copies of it, and distributing these copies; another group might be doing the same with John Mark's gospel. When you have different groups preserving the same or similar materials, it also makes the accuracy of the text much more likely (this is one reason that we know the Old Testament is so dependable; rival institutions preserved Old Testament text over many centuries, and yet that text remains the same, no matter which group the text came from).
13. The gospels are different enough, yet similar enough, to suggest that they were produced by different authors. One could take a few verses from John and a few verses from Luke, and any Greek student could recognize that these are written by different authors. One could compare the subject matter of John with the subject matter of Matthew and see a completely different perspective on the same events, even though these are the same events. The gospels are so different in subject matter and vocabulary as to make doubtful that these two men conspired together in order to produce two documents that were in agreement with one another, so that they could proclaim their spiritual vision to whoever would listen.
14. The 3 gospels which are very similar also sport distinct differences in style and observations. The bloodlines alone in Matthew and Luke make it clear that these two men did not get together to get their story straight. They may have associated with one another; but neither seemed to exert influence over the other when it came to content.
15. It is also important to recognize that the greatest event of human history, that God would take upon Himself the form of a man (in fact, He became a man in all respects), and then paid for our sins, should have a greater, more accurate witness than any other event of human history. Of all the events of ancient human history, none are as well-documented as the life and crucifixion of Jesus Christ.
16. Furthermore, since we have approximately 26,000 ancient manuscripts of the New Testament (fragments and entire manuscripts), not only can we piece together the exact text (or very nearly, the exact text), but it is also clear that no church or organization came along in history and edited Scripture in order to get across their point of view. There are just too many manuscripts, whose individual histories are too diverse in order to make a credible claim that some group changed them in order to further this or that set of doctrines. In fact, what we have is just the opposite. Since New Testament manuscripts were often in conflict with Catholic doctrine, the Catholic church for centuries simply kept the Bible out of the hands of its parishioners (and persecuted any who tried to distribute Scripture) and they developed a doctrine to allow them to modify the faith—the pope could make a proclamation any time that he felt like it to establish this or that church doctrine, and it was to be taken on an equal footing with the Bible. If the Catholic church actually made changes to the New Testament, then there would be no reason to keep it out of the hands of the faithful; and no reason to allege that the pope could make divine pronouncements whenever he felt like it. Furthermore, we have hundreds of manuscripts which predate the Catholic Church.

17. The gospels, therefore, not only establish the certain historicity of the events that they record, but they establish the meaning of these events (as do the epistles; as does the Old Testament).