The Gospels are the first four books in the New Testament: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. They impart the story of Jesus’ earthly ministry. Matthew, Mark and Luke are known often as the Synoptic gospels. Synoptic comes from two Greek words that mean “able to be seen together.” These three gospels give a basic account of the happenings in our Lord’s earthly life. They are not exactly the same but generally their accounts and arrangement are about the same. When we come to John we will see that his account deals more with the final weeks of Jesus’ life than do the others, nor does he dwell on the birth or early life of Christ.

Alleged Discrepancies In The Bible

It is sometimes argued by critics of the Bible that there are discrepancies in it. I don’t buy into that because I know something about writing and writers. For example, I have dozens of books on World War II - closer to a hundred. All of the authors deal with the same basic subject, the world conflict that started in September of 1939 and ended in August of 1945. But the writers of these histories have different interests, different ways of expressing themselves, different concepts of events they considered more important than others. But they still all tell the same story, all based on the reality of what truly happened. It is the same with Scripture. Here we have some 40 authors (dealing with the entire Bible), writing over a period of 1500 years, telling the same basic story but bracketed in different time periods, empires and cultures. I have long ago concluded there are no discrepancies here - only 40 different men telling the greatest story ever told, all from different perspectives.

The word “gospels” mean “good news.” The New Testament gospels give the story of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection and declare strongly the good news of God’s victory through Jesus over the powers of sin and death.

THE TIME OF THE WRITINGS by Commentator Matt Slick

"Dating the gospels is very important. If it can be established that the gospels were written early - say before the year 70 A.D., then we would have good reason for believing
that they were written by the disciples of Jesus. If they were written by the disciples, then their reliability, authenticity, and accuracy are better substantiated. Also, if they were written early, this would mean that there would have been enough time for myth to creep into the gospel accounts since it was the eyewitnesses to Christ’s life that wrote them. Furthermore, those who were alive at the time of the events could have countered the gospel accounts and since we have no contradictory writings to the gospels, their early authorship as well as apostolic authorship becomes even more critical.

“None of the gospels mention the actual destruction of the Jewish temple in 70 A.D. This is significant because Jesus had prophesied concerning the temple (Luke 21:6 ‘As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down.’) This prophecy was fulfilled in 70 A.D. when the Romans sacked Jerusalem and burned the temple. Such an obvious fulfillment of Jesus’ prophecy would have been recorded as such by the gospel writers. But it was not included suggesting that the gospels (at least Matthew, Mark and Luke) were written before 70 A.D.”

The Gospel of John was written by the great apostle later in his life when he was a pastor and church administrator headquartered in Ephesus, Turkey. So his would have been the last of the four Gospels to be penned. It is commonly accepted that Matthew’s account was the first written. However, some of his remembrance could have come courtesy of John Mark (Mark’s Gospel) who himself had the Apostle Peter as a mentor.

MATTHEW

The Genealogy Of Jesus: May I recommend to you that when you encourage new converts to study the Word of God you do not suggest they start with Matthew. The genealogy would stymie a veteran of the Word in some instances. However, to the student of the Bible, Matthew 1 is just sensational. Matthew records 42 generations of the ancestors of Jesus. I will not take the space in these notes to give them here; however, I encourage you to read this chapter which tells of dozens of predecessors in the line of Christ - some of the really good and some of them really bad! Some were bad at the beginning but had true “life-turns” later on. The 42 sets of ancestors is divided into three groupings:

• From Abraham to David - Around 1900 - 900 B.C.
• From Solomon to the final Babylonian invasion - 586 B.C.
• From the end of the exile to the birth of Jesus - 4 B.C.

The “grim ones” would include Manasseh, the worst king in the history of Jerusalem.
The ones who made sensational life-changes would include Judah, Ruth and Rahab. This
geneology proves that God’s redemptive measures can saturate any life - if the person is willing to come to Him humbly and penitently.

MATTHEW, THE MAN

He was also known as Levi. He was a tax collector in the Galilee area, working for the hated Romans. His job was so hated by the people at large that he was known as not only a publican but a SINNER (Luke 15:1) Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him.

Each year in Israel I spend time in Capernaum - the city located at the north end of the Sea of Galilee. His office - or collection place - was somewhere near the main gate. The Romans allowed their "tax collectors" to extort extra money for their own benefit to whatever extent they wanted, provided such actions did not lead to revolt against Rome.

Alexander Whyte (who wrote the classic book Bible Characters (Zondervan Publ.) wrote of Matthew, “Jesus of Nazareth, the carpenter’s Son, knew Matthew the publican quite well. Perhaps only too well. Jesus and His mother had by this time migrated from Nazareth to Capernaum. He had often in Matthew’s toll-booth with His mother’s taxes, with other poor people’s taxes.” Herman Lockyer (All The Men In The Bible - Zondervan) added: “But the outcast was called by Christ to a better occupation, to better wealth than silver and gold, to serve a better King than Caesar. Without hesitation Matthew left all, arose and followed Christ.” Luke 5:28 And he left all, rose up, and followed him.

It has been observed by many Bible scholars that Matthew wrote for Jews; Mark for Romans; Luke for the Greeks; and John for the Church. You and I should remember that Matthew is known as THE GOSPEL OF THE KING. “The figure of Jesus painted in colors of royalty. His ancestry is traced from a royal line (David); His birth is dreaded by a rival king (Herod), and Wise Men offer their royal gifts; His herald (John the Baptist) declares that ‘the Kingdom is at hand.’ His temptation reaches its climax when He is offered the kingdom of the world; his great message to his followers, the Sermon on the Mount, is like the manifesto of a king, setting forth the fundamental laws of His kingdom.” (The Gospel of Matthew / Charles Erdman / Westminster Press / page 9).

It is somewhat perplexing to the casual reader that Matthew does not necessarily record the ministry of Jesus in a completely chronological order. He rather groups similar events or teachings which are logically related.
Matthew gives us the five great discourses by Jesus:

- The Sermon on the Mount - chapters 5 - 7
- The Instruction to the Disciples  9:35 to 10:42
- The Parables of the Kingdom (throughout the book)
- The woes against the Pharisees
- The Prophetic discourse in chapters 24 and 25

Here is a simple outline that may help you in your study of Matthew:

1. The birth, infancy, and preparation of the King, Jesus  1:1-4:11
2. The Sermon on the Mount (the Constitution of Christ’s Kingdom) ch 5-7
3. The Credentials of the King (first ten miracles) 8:1-9:34
4. Instructions to the Disciples 9:35 - 10:42
5. The Claims of the King  ch. 11 - 12
6. The Parables of the King  13
7. The Withdrawal of the King 14:1 - 16:12
8. The Person and Work of the King - 16:13 - 17:27
9. Directions to the King’s subjects 18 - 20
10. Rejection of the King  21 - 23
11. Prophecies of the King’s Return  24 - 25
12. The Death and Resurrection of the King  26 - 28

Let’s touch on just a few of the characters highlighted for us by Matthew:

THE WISE MEN

There are a few “fairy tales” about these men. They are called by some, “kings,” which they were not. It is said there were three of them, probably because they brought to Jesus (1) gold, (2) frankincense and (3) myrrh. And further their names were Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar, that one came from India, one from Greece and one from Egypt. That is all stuff and nonsense, of course. The truth is we don’t know much about these “wise men.” They step on humanity’s stage only for one short scene and then they are gone. Their designation as “wise men” is a translation of the Greek word, “Magi.” The important thing to me about these fellows is that they were doubtless Gentiles, non-Jews. They were “heathen” and represent the first fruits of the Gentile nations. Even lying in the manger, Jesus was touching the lost for He came to be a missionary. They outwitted the evil King Herod, found Jesus, presented their gifts, and departed by “another way.” Herod responded by sending his soldiers to kill all children in Bethlehem under the age of 2 years.
JOHN THE BAPTIST

Matthew 3:1-6

In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, [2] And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. [3] For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. [4] And the same John had his raiment of camel’s hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey. [5] Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, [6] And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.

John the Baptist (actually a cousin of Jesus as John’s mother Elisabeth and Jesus’ mother Mary were closely related) should be known as “THE HERALD OF THE KING.” Think of him like this: When our President gives his annual State of the Union address, he is announced to the joint houses of Congress, “The President of the United States.”

It is my own personal belief that John the Baptist could have been an Essene (holy men who congregated at nearby Qumran - who gave us the Dead Sea Scrolls). He certainly was an ascetic as Matthew reminds us - he wore very rough clothing and his cuisine was basic (to say the least).

John had the courage to stand up to Herod Antipas (then ruling the nation) and paid for it by being beheaded - probably in the year 32 A.D.. The tragedy took place at the royal palace at Machaerus (located just east of the Dead Sea in the country of Jordan). I have included a genealogy of Herod - and his other family members who ruled also under the name of Herod - at the end of these notes. I have also included a picture of Machaerus and a description.

It was John the Baptist who baptized (immersed) Jesus in the Jordan River - just north of the Dead Sea at a place called Bethabara. For many years this site was closed to tourists because of its extremely close proximity to Jordan. I have added a picture of the baptismal site on the next page, taken from the Jordanian side (note how close it is to the Israeli bank - perhaps 75-100 feet.) It was here that John immersed our Lord. We now visit this site located about six miles east of the ruins of Jericho. It was also very near here where Joshua led the Israelites across the Jordan as told us in Joshua 3 and 4. We don’t baptize at this part of the river now as it is extremely dirty, but we can visualize how it was in the days of John the Baptist.
THE BAPTISMAL SITE ON THE JORDAN RIVER WHERE JOHN THE BAPTIST MINISTERED

THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS

The 4th chapter of Matthew details our Lord’s 40-day fast in the wilderness, followed by the temptation when Satan appeared to Him. A BETTER WORD THAN ‘TEMPT’ HERE WOULD BE ‘TEST.’ You may recall that in Genesis 22 we have the story of Abraham’s being told by God to sacrifice his son Isaac. Genesis 22:1 And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am. You can readily see here how much more accurate is the verb TEST.

Just as metal has to be tested far beyond any stress and strain that it will ever be called upon to bear, before it can be put to any useful purpose, so a man has to be tested before God can use him for his purposes. The Jews had a saying, ‘The Holy One, blessed be His Name, does not elevate a man to dignity till he has first tried and searched him; and if he stands in temptation, then he raised him to dignity.’

MATTHEW / WILLIAM BARCLAY / WESTMINSTER PRESS / PAGES 62-63

Jesus passed the “test” with flying colors. Now He would head back toward Galilee, choose His disciples, and begin three years of ministry that changed the world.
THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Matthew 5:1-14
And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: [2] And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying, [3] Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. [4] Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. [5] Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. [6] Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. [7] Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. [8] Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. [9] Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. [10] Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. [11] Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. [12] Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

[13] Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. [14] Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.

This is how God expects us to live. Not suggestions – commandments! Only through the power of the indwelling Jesus can we so live. The above verses are the BEATITUDES – easy to remember, this should “Be Our Attitude” to life. Just as our U.S. Constitution has a preamble, known as The Bill of Rights, so God’s Constitution has a preamble known as The Beatitudes.

THE LEPER

Matthew 8:1-4

When he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him. [2] And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. [3] And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. [4] And Jesus saith unto him, See thou tell no man; but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.

When Jesus finished speaking, He headed back down the hillside to Capernaum - just a short walk. There at the gate He was approached by a leper. In the ancient world, leprosy was considered the most heinous of all diseases - hopeless. One thing was sure:
NO ONE TOUCHED A LEPER. But Jesus did - He not only healed him, but He
touched the man. It is our role as His followers to touch the world - just as the Good
Samaritan did for that poor fellow who was almost killed on the Road to Jericho.

TWO REACTIONS TO JESUS

Matthew 9:32-34

As they went out, behold, they brought to him a dumb man possessed with a devil.
[33] And when the devil was cast out, the dumb spake: and the multitudes
marvelled, saying, It was never so seen in Israel. [34] But the Pharisees said, He
casteth out devils through the prince of the devils.

Matthew teaches us clearly that no one can be neutral about Jesus. The crowds were
amazed at His words and deeds. But the Pharisees hated Him. They did not deny His
powers, but attributed them to Satan. So it remains even now. Jesus Himself said,
Matthew 12:30: He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with
me scattereth abroad.

THE MOUNT OF TRANSFIGURATION

Matthew 17:1-8

And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth
them up into an high mountain apart, [2] And was transfigured before them: and his
face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. [3] And, behold,
there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him. [4] Then answered
Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make
here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. [5] While
he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of
the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye
him. [6] And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid.
[7] And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid. [8] And
when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only.

Where? Mount Hermon - the 10,000 ft high mountain that separates Israel from Syria
and Lebanon. Before this story, Jesus had asked His disciples at Caesarea Philippi - 14
miles away, “Who do people say I am?” Peter responded, “You are the Christ of God!”
It was upon Peter’s profession of faith in Christ that the church is founded - not Peter, the
man.

Now Jesus is heading back south to Jerusalem - and Calvary. But first, the stop on Mt.
Hermon. Jesus went there to pray (Luke 9:29 And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistening.)

Who? Jesus and three of His disciples - Peter, James and John. Two Old Testament heroes are brought back for this intense moment: Elijah and Moses.

Why? It is my opinion that Jesus knew He was on His way to incredible suffering on the cross - PLUS the drinking of the Cup of mankind’s sin there in the Garden of Gethsemane. His Father, God, met with Him on the mountain top - almost as if He brings His Son aside to make sure He was aware of the divine sanction. Jesus was God, but He was also man. The prospect that lay before Him must have been beyond daunting.

THE MOUNT OF OLIVES DISCOURSE - MATTHEW 24 AND 25

Upon arriving back in Jerusalem, Jesus and His disciples went to the great Temple, just constructed by Herod the Great. The disciples were overwhelmed by it and wanted Jesus to be impressed, too. But our Lord told them the Temple would be short lived, but the future of mankind was much more important:

Matthew 24:1-4

And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple. [2] And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.

[3] And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world? [4] And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you.

Today there is a lot of teaching in pulpits and media about the future, much of it valid and scriptural; however, much of it is stuff and nonsense. Any prophetic teaching by anyone has to be compared to Jesus’ teachings in these two chapters. I cannot encourage too much to study these two incredible chapters!

THE LAST SUPPER

We read this well-known story in Matthew 26. Matthew 26:17-19 Now the first day of the feast of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the passover? [18] And he said, Go into the
city to such a man, and say unto him, The Master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep the passover at thy house with my disciples. [19] And the disciples did as Jesus had appointed them; and they made ready the passover.

The Passover Feast brought in unbelievable crowds to Jerusalem, yet had to be celebrated within the city. Jesus had already made preparation for it on Mount Zion. The Feast commemorated the greatest event in the history of Israel, the deliverance from slavery in Egypt. When the Israelites fled from that nation they had to do so in such haste they did not have time to bake their bread leavened (Ex. 1234).

It was at this Feast that Jesus gave His disciples the bread and cup, signifying they represented His body which would be offered the very next day for the sins of the world.

There is a place on Mount Zion that we visit each year called the Upper Room. It is not the same building as the original, though it may well be within the footprint of it. The current building goes back to the Crusades.

GETHSEMANE

Matthew 26:36-46

Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. [37] And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. [38] Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me. [39] And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt. [40] And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? [41] Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. [42] He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done. [43] And he came and found them asleep again: for their eyes were heavy. [44] And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. [45] Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. [46] Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray me.

Jesus was sinless. His death on the cross would not have atoned for my sins unless they were somehow connected to them. That awful cup, given Him by the Father, contained
my sins - and your's. And He drank it! Finite reasoning cannot fully comprehend the occasion. Fleshly eyes would fail to discover the awful spectacle of the cup of that crisis hour when the sweat of the suffering Messiah ran crimson down His brow and the soul of the Only Begotten was 'sorrowful even unto death.' The eyes of Christ were not limited, nor was His mind the stunted one of mortals, so that the terrifying impact of the contents should escape detection. As others slept close by, He watched. And as He watched a sinner spat out blasphemy - and it settle in the cup. A lustful wretch desecrated a woman's virtue - and it reached the cup. A drunken son strangled a tender mother - and murder made its way to the cup. A depraved degenerate snatched a wee babe from its mother's arms and dashed its brains out on the rocks - and depravity was in the cup.

Every deed of nameless wrong hatched in the black haunts of hell, every smear of debauchery and stain of iniquity, settled like thick, black dregs to the bottom of the cup. With trembling fingers, Jesus raised the cup. His garments were now gory in the sweat of His soul-agony, and the slumbering disciples aroused only to hear His plea, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me!" The God-man has now pressed the cup to His lips and the bitter contents slip away. He who knew no sin became sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. And so Jesus leaves the garden in full victory. There is no terror now. Caïaphas' court presents no fear. Pilate's judgment hall can hold no alarm. The scourge, the spittle, the thorns, the nails, the spear were in the cup. The Cross was in that cup. And Jesus drank the cup! Hallelujah! What a Savior!

THE CRUCIFIXION AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST

Matthew gives his readers a thorough account of the crucifixion and resurrection, both subject of which we will cover in our study of Mark, Luke and John. And he concludes his gospel story with the last act of Jesus on earth prior to His ascension:

Matthew 28:16-20

Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. [17] And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted. [18] And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. [19] Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: [20] Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

We will pick up the study of Mark, Luke and John in two weeks, April 5th. I regret that I will be in Springfield, Mo., next week attending the Executive Presbytery meeting.
This is a photo of Herod's palace on Machaerus in the country of Jordan, about 15 miles southeast of the Jordan River. According to the contemporary historian Flavius Josephus it is the location of the imprisonment and execution of John the Baptist. It took place in 32 AD shortly before the Passover, following an imprisonment that could have lasted two years.

The fortress palace was originally built by the Hasmonean king, Alexander Jannaeus, about 90 B.C. It was destroyed by the Roman General Pompey's army in 57 B.C., but later rebuilt by Herod the Great in 30 B.C. to be used as a military base to safeguard his territories east of the Jordan.

Upon the death of Herod the Great, the fortress was passed to his son, Herod Antipas, who ruled from 4 B.C. until 39 A.D. It was during this time that John the Baptist was arrested, imprisoned and beheaded (at the demand of Salome). John had berated the king for his immorality.

The fortress palace was torn down by the Roman forces who attacked Israel - as Jesus had predicted - around 72 A.D. When I visited the site, this was as close as I got, not wanting to hike that 1100 ft high mound on which the palace sat - especially in the terrible heat.
Herod's Family Tree

Herod the Great
King of Palestine 37-4 BC (Luke 1:5) He built many cities and structures including the temple in Jerusalem. He killed the boy babies in Bethlehem (Matt. 2:17)

Antipater

Alexander

Herod Aristobulus

Herod Philip I
He married Herodius and fathered Salome (Matt. 14:3; Mark 6:17)

Herod Archelaus
He ruled Judea, Samaria, & Idumaea 4 BC-6 AD (Matt. 2:23)

Herod Philip II
He ruled Iturea & Trachonitis 4 BC-34 AD (Luke 3:1) He married Salome

Herod Antipas I

Herod Agrippa I
He was king of Palestine 37-44 AD. He killed James, imprisoned Peter, and God smote him (Acts 12:1-11, 23)

Herod of Chaldea
He ruled 41-48 AD. He married Bernice

Herod Agrippa II
He ruled Chaldea & the northern territory 50-70 AD. Paul addressed him and Bernice (Acts 25:13-26:23)

Drusilla

Bernice
She married Herod of Chaldea. She heard Paul with Herod Agrippa II (Acts 25:13-26:32)

Salome
The daughter of Herodias & Herod Philip I. She danced before Herod Antipas (Mark 6:22). She married Herod Philip II